

Bus parking threatens mall project

Transit district, council at odds over bus-overflow area

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CAPITOLA — Increased traffic, drainage problems and building designs have been conquered, but a proposed bus overflow parking area is now threatening to delay the \$35 million Capitola Mall expansion project.

The City Council Thursday night — after an argument that sometimes became heated — approved an agreement for a bus transfer center in front of the expanded mall. That agreement, however, did not include the bus overflow parking area that Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District board believes is essential.

Transit District Executive Director Scott Galloway said afterward that his board "does not feel the (problems in the) environmental impact report are adequately mitigated without the overflow bus parking area."

Those problems relate to addressing the transit needs on the mall site.

The City Council voted 3-1, with Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan against and Councilman Jerry Clarke absent, that the approved agreement was adequate since it allowed for a transfer center that would accommodate six buses at once.

Mayor Bob Bucher exploded during the meeting when Galloway told council members that legal counsel had advised the transit board that environmental mitigations would not be met without the overflow bus area.

"That's B.S.," shouted Bucher. "I'm not going to let him threaten me that they're going to hold up the project. I'm not going to let them stop us."

John Gotto, spokesman for mall developer Cypress Properties of Menlo

The council majority maintains that the city had put all the time and effort into seeing that the mall expansion was aesthetically pleasing, and does not want to see the front of the mall covered with long lines of buses.

Park, said later that he doesn't know whether the new brouhaha will delay the mall expansion.

"Frankly, I'm not a legal beagle, so I don't know," he said. "If the council is right (about the problems in the environmental impact report being adequately addressed), then it won't slow us up."

According to Gotto, Cypress had hoped to break ground on the expansion next month.

That expansion has already been approved by the city and also has won approvals from most other outside agencies having jurisdiction in the project. The expansion, earmarked for completion in the fall of 1988, would nearly double the county's only covered mall by adding 304,575 square feet to the existing 381,098 square-foot mall.

Galloway added later that he doesn't know whether the transit board will vote to pursue legal action against the city. The board will meet again July 24.

"All I know is that they're expanding the mall without enlarging the bus transfer area," he said.

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to see the front of the mall covered with long lines of buses.

"If they (Metropolitan Transit District) want the transfer center, let them buy land for it," said Councilman Ron Graves. Councilman Michael Routh said he didn't want to see "10 or 12 buses lined up in front of the mall."

Bucher added that the transit board was "sticking a gun to the head of Cypress, saying, 'give us this or we'll hold you up.'"

Galloway argued that the bus overflow area was just that — an area that the district did not expect to have to use. He gained the support of Councilwoman Harlan, who reiterated that Cypress was willing to go along with the overflow area.

"It has never been the direction of my board to negotiate an agreement without having adequate overflow parking," added Galloway.

Before the overflow bus parking problem surfaced, it appeared Cypress was going to finalize most of the expansion details.

The council approved both the redesign of J.C. Penney — one of the two new anchor stores, along with Leask's — in the design of the Clares Street Loop Road.

The building design of Penney had been rejected two weeks ago for being "flat, uninteresting and boxy." Penney architects worked overtime in returning a redesign that satisfied council members. Changes included additional layering on the outside of the building to add interest, including brick, textured plaster and different colors.

"Most big chains don't readily accommodate cities as fast as you have," said Routh in lauding Penney's.

The loop road, meanwhile, was approved 3-1, with Graves against.

That road will extend Clares Street from 40th Avenue to Capitola Road, running behind the expanded mall. It will consist of two lanes 11 feet wide, separated by an 11-foot landscaped median. Turning lanes would be carved from the median at various points to allow access to the mall and properties on the opposite side of the road.

The new road would intersect with Capitola Road about 150 feet west of the existing Capitola Road-Bulb Avenue intersection. Signals would be installed at both the loop road and Capitola Road, as well as Capitola Road and 38th Avenue.

Graves had problems with the loop road's not intersecting with 38th Avenue. He also argued against extending the Capitola Road median to prohibit west-bound Capitola Road vehicles were eliminated, said Public Works Director Larry Perlin, "to avoid conflicts with vehicles circulating through the new Clares Street Loop Road/Capitola Road intersection."

"Once Bulb Avenue residents find out, they're going to storm the council chamber," Graves said.