

UC Controversy Slated For Hearing

One of the most controversial development proposals for Santa Cruz County in the next decade has been scheduled for its first public discussion at the end of next month.

The University of California at Santa Cruz, looking at a future of money shortages, decided last year to explore the possibility of building a massive electronics research and development park as a way to help pay the bills.

Preliminary plans point toward a facility of around 50 acres that would employ 1,200 people when completed in 1992.

While UCSC officials maintain the project will benefit the community by creating jobs and increased property revenues, a growing number of neighborhood and environmental activists are concerned the project will put money in the University coffers while draining scarce resources in town.

Critics of the proposal have suggested it could intensify the local housing crisis, increase traffic congestion, strain already limited water resources and add to air pollution.

Although the University has agreed to talk about its plans in public, the project might go ahead without any formal

review or decision by the local government agencies that regulate private developments.

If the park is built to the west of Empire Grade, it would be within the coastal zone and the University would have to apply to the local government for a permit just like any other developer.

However, the entire project could be constructed on the east side of Empire Grade and outside the coastal zone. In that case the Environmental Impact Report would be written by a University employee and the ultimate review of the project's effects would be in the hands of the University Regents.

A preliminary report on the development, released in February, suggests the University is aware of at least some of the possible side effects the research park could bring.

If a high number of the skilled and well-paid technicians to be employed at the project come from outside the community, those individuals will add to the already fierce competition for housing. "Concern will also be directed toward helping to alleviate the serious housing shortage for moderate income families within the City of Santa Cruz," the University report suggests.

And that report also pointed toward traffic woes that could result from the large electronics complex. "The neighborhood adjacent to (the project) is residential," that report states, adding "increased commuter traffic and possible parking congestion will impact on the neighborhood and on the University."

In addition to the questions raised in the University's

report, City Councilmember John Laird has expressed concern that the park could add to the strain on local water resources. Electronics is a tremendously water-intensive industry and the City is already facing the problem that the state could impose new restrictions on the use of water from the San Lorenzo in order to protect the river.

County Supervisor Gary Patton, Santa Cruz City Councilmember Mardi Wormhoudt and UCSC Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer will discuss the proposed development at a public hearing to be held the night of November 30 at the Loudon Nelson Community Center. Both Patton and Wormhoudt have already expressed strong reservations about the project.

The public discussion of the development was organized by the Western Limits Neighborhood Association, the Environmental Council, the Sierra Club and the Santa Cruz Action Network and will be moderated by the League of Women Voters.

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