

Reason for worry?

BC businesses unhappy with town plan proposal

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BOULDER CREEK — When Sami Abed started his video rental business six years ago, he lived right there in the same building with his store at the south end of Boulder Creek.

But after his kids came along, and he moved elsewhere, he was surprised when the county planning department turned down his application to add his former living quarters to his business.

Abed's 75-year-old property is zoned for commercial use, and previously housed a plumbing store and a feed store.

However, the county's general plan calls for residential use in the area.

Following a meeting last week with members of the planning department, Abed's dilemma, he thinks, will likely be resolved in his favor.

Still, after putting some \$70,000 into improving his property, he worries that if it burned down, he wouldn't be allowed to rebuild it as a business.

He's not alone in his worries. At a recent meeting of the Boulder Creek Business Association, several business owners voiced their concerns about potential recommendations coming out of the Town Plan workshops.

Hundreds of residents have shown up at the county-sponsored workshops which aim to get community opinion on the town's long-range development.

Business owners in general agreed with recommendations to widen the commercial business area in the heart of downtown.

However, they're unhappy with a proposal to get rid of the commercial district at the south end of town.

Separated from the downtown

'Trying to change the land-use to residential did not have a lot of support.'

— Ann Burns,
town plan manager

business core area by a three-block stretch of houses, the short stretch of Highway 9 south of Grove Street is a jumbled mix of enterprises.

Besides Abed's video store, there's a laundromat, a restaurant, a glass store, a hair cutter and an exterminator, among others.

Planners from the San Francisco firm of Freedman, Tung & Bottomley, which is leading the workshops, say the area is "strip commercial."

Referring to the area as "Lorenzo", the name of a town once located there, they suggested changing the area to residential use.

Businesses already there would be "grandfathered" in, but if they burned down, or changed hands, or were vacant long enough, they could lose their commercial zoning.

Downtown merchants as well as "Lorenzo" merchants are unhappy with the idea.

Bill Gutzwiller, of the Pinnacle Grouse jewelry store, cited a recent economic study of Boulder Creek. The study calls the town's current 250,000 square feet of

businesses inadequate, and suggests adding another 176,000 square feet of business space to keep shoppers from going over the hill.

"I don't want to see anything lost," said Gutzwiller.

No problem, said Ann Burns, the project manager of the town plan from Freedman, Tung and Bottomley.

"That's something we can work with," said Burns. "We just put things out for the community to discuss. Trying to change the land-use to residential did not have a lot of support. We got negative feedback, that was clear to us."

She added, "I have a feeling that we will maybe just work a little more closely with street improvements, not so much long-range land-use. We would still like to encourage most of the commercial development into downtown."

Jeff Loux, assistant planning director for the county, calls it a "non-issue."

"I think we can work it out," said Loux. "It's the community's plan. What they say, goes."

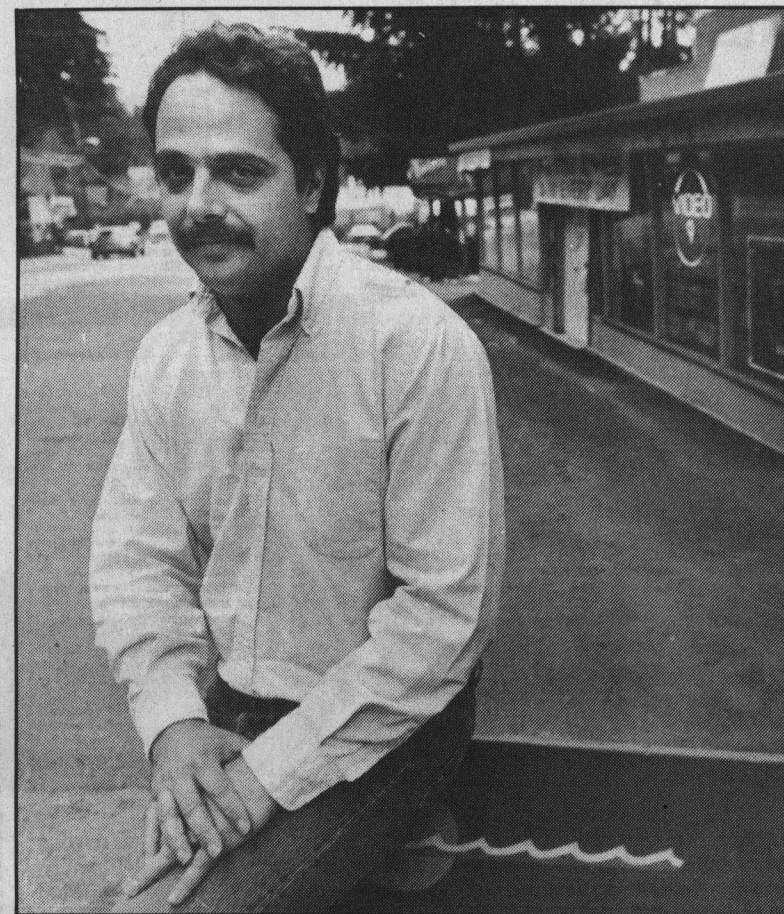
But merchants are skeptical.

"I'm confused at the power these town plans have," said Valerie Zachary, owner of Zach's Cafe, one of the "Lorenzo" businesses. "I don't want the south end of town to be swept away."

Gutzwiller described the town plan process as a "once in a lifetime thing. It's gonna be how it's gonna be for the next 25 to 30 years."

Local realtor Don Schwarzbach and auctioneer Bob Slawinski, president of the association, also cautioned the business community to stay involved with the process.

"Don't listen to what they're



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Sami Abed wonders about future of his video rental business.

saying," said Slawinski. "Read between the lines."

Once the town plan is adopted by the board of supervisors, it will be the land use policy for the area, according to Loux.

San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley agrees the town plan is important.

Referring to already-completed town plans for Felton and Ben Lomond, Keeley said, "I use the town plans all the time. It's the blueprint."

To address residents' concerns, Keeley is putting together smaller meetings before the fourth and final town plan workshop, which will probably be in April.

Residents interested in the

smaller meetings should contact Keeley's office.

Whatever plan the town comes up with then will go before the county planning commission, probably in May, and ultimately the board of supervisors, by June or July.

Meanwhile, Abed has his fingers crossed.

"The town plan process is good for the town, but it's going to affect a lot of things for a long time," said Abed.

"There's always going to be commercial, there's always going to be residential," he added. "I want to improve the community, but we need to work with what's there."