

SV Drive plan runs into potholes

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Three of the six largest landowners in a proposed assessment district to pay for Scotts Valley Drive plan to file written protests, and a fourth company may follow suit.

In another development, the Chamber of Commerce board of directors voted 13-2 Thursday to support the assessment district only if the money it raises is reduced by \$3 million. Chamber leaders believe the City Council should use more Redevelopment Agency money, but it's unlikely that much money can be found in city coffers.

Council members proposed the assessment district to raise more than \$11 million to help

pay for a \$16-million-plus remake of Scotts Valley Drive. The plan calls for moving utility wires underground, repairing the washboard road, and installing landscaping, streetlights and medians. Work could start by summer.

If owners of 50 percent of the parcels in the proposed district file protests, the council is expected to abort the plan.

Kate Greene, executive director of the chamber, said the board also decided to ask the City Council to delay its decision on whether to form the district, now set for May 31, and take more time to educate the public about the assessment district.

"It's true that this (the assessment district) didn't just happen overnight," said Greene.

"But now it hits home, so they might as well try to educate the public."

Those paying some of the largest assessments are worried about the impact of those costs.

"I think it's too much for what the people can afford right now," said Alvin Scarborough, whose family owns building and supply companies in Scotts Valley and the San Lorenzo Valley. "It's poor timing to do this."

The Scarboroughs face a \$354,689 assessment if the Council forms the district.

Another prominent Scotts Valley family, the Ows, already have said they will formally protest the \$467,301 assessment they face. The family owns King's Village Shopping Center on

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Mount Hermon Road.

Officials from Watkins-Johnson also are expected to file a protest. Watkins-Johnson would be assessed \$253,158.

"The cost to us seems out of proportion to the benefits we receive from it," said Bill Weitz, the company's director of human resources and administration. "We're off Mount Hermon Road, not Scotts Valley Drive. ... They've got to fix Mount Hermon Road, so my guess is they're going to reopen that assessment district and we'll have to pay for that, too."

Comerica Bank-California, which owns the old Pacific Western Bank site on Mount Hermon Road, still is undecided.

"We're not pleased and we're exploring our options," said Mike Fulton, president and chief executive officer of the San Jose-based company, which faces a \$365,073 assessment.

These four companies represent 12 percent of the land in the proposed assessment area, so their votes carry a significant impact.

Officials from the two companies facing the stiffest assessments, Borland International and Seagate Technology Inc., will not protest the district.

According to a company spokeswoman, "Seagate does not participate in any political activities," and will not join the organized tax protest. Seagate faces a \$483,908 assessment. Borland faces the largest assessment, \$532,546.

Business owners who might otherwise support the

project are particularly concerned about the medians, which some claim could make it too difficult for customers to reach their businesses.

"That is not something good for business," said Akbar Abdollahi, who owns Scotts Valley Car Wash.

Abdollahi also said that if Scotts Valley Drive is torn up for 18 months, his business will drop off even more than it has since construction began on the Scotts Valley Drive/Mount Hermon Road intersection. "No one wants a clean car with that going on."

Scarborough said he believes Scotts Valley Drive needs repairs, but the project should be scaled back, possibly eliminating the medians, landscaping and underground utilities. "If they would do that, they would have a much better chance of succeeding with the project."

Owners of other Scotts Valley Drive businesses already have filed written protests, including the Scotts Valley Veterinary Clinic, Professional Touch, Stout Construction Co., Bogner Properties and the Dawson, Passafiume and Bowden law firm.

The owners of Professional Touch, Guy and Lisa Fowler, wrote: "We feel the Scotts Valley Drive improvement project is not very conservative and/or practical. It includes many 'cosmetic' improvements and is much more costly than needs to be."

Al Telles, who owns Creekside Apartments on Scotts Valley Drive, also has filed a protest. He said Thursday he believes the project is "too big for our little city and I don't think they can spread it (assessments) out enough to make everyone happy."