

New snags in Auto Row proposal

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel Staff Writer

CAPITOLA — The proposed Auto Row development ran into a roadblock Thursday night — a roadblock of detrimental environmental impacts that must be solved before the second largest project in city history is approved.

Only Capitola Mall has been bigger. Four Santa Cruz auto dealers representing 11 makes of cars are proposing to move by fall to the 10-acre parcel next to Highway 1 near 41st Avenue. It is the largest remaining vacant parcel in Capitola.

The City Council and Planning Commission held a joint special meeting to discuss the project's draft environmental impact report.

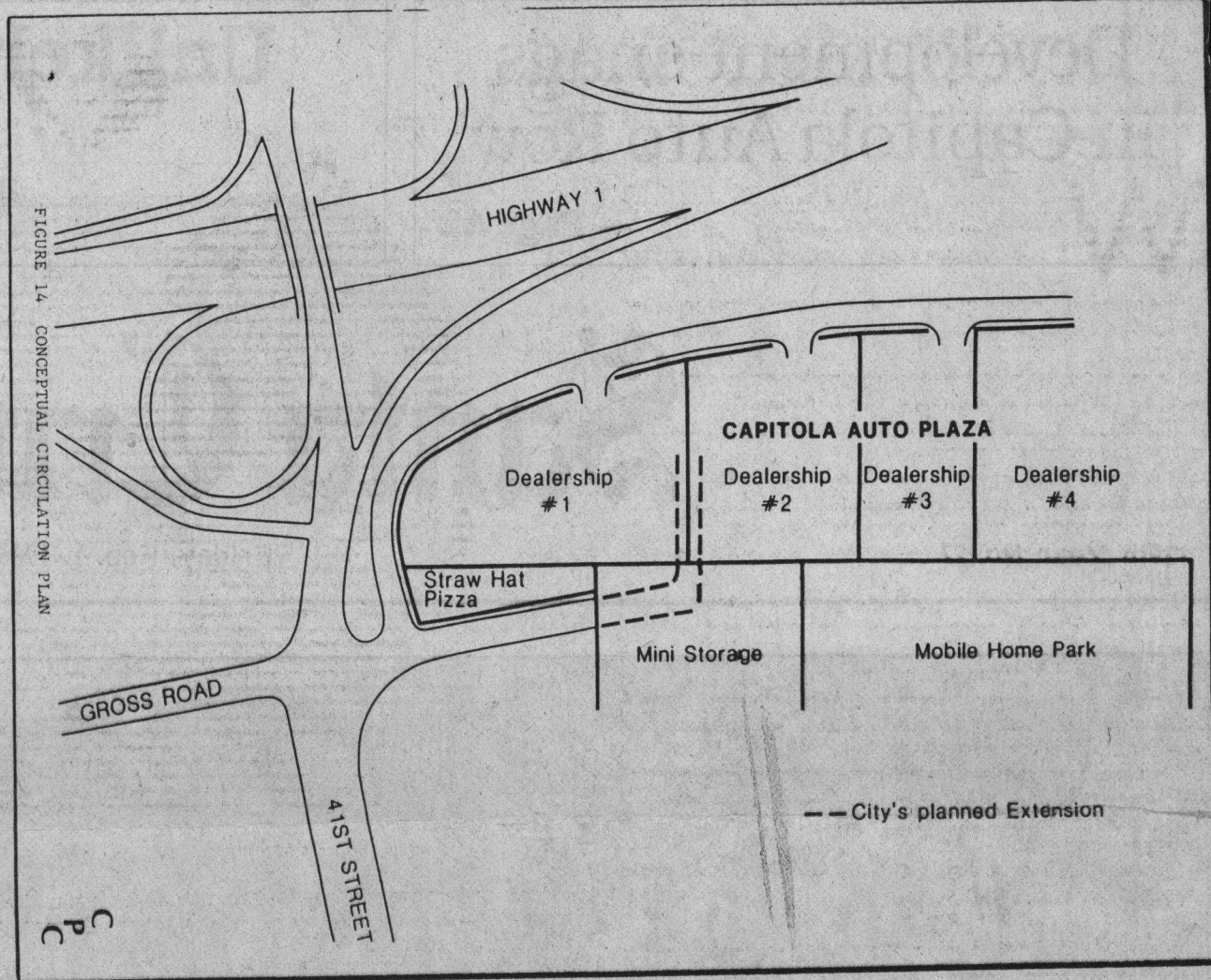
Solving those concerns, however, may be a difficult task — at least according to the details listed by city officials. Everything from drainage, landscaping, noise and traffic to plans for a "Capitola Auto Plaza" clock tower at the entrance to the development came under questioning.

Applicant Gary Reece of DaPont Construction of Santa Cruz hopes to answer those concerns in the final environmental impact report. That final report is expected to come before the Planning Commission in mid-March.

The proposed clock tower may be one of the more intriguing concerns. Planned to be 40 feet in height located near 41st Avenue and Gross Road, council members and planning commissioners debated whether the tower should be classified as a free-standing sign and, therefore, subject to the city's strict ordinance regulating height.

Reece maintained the clock tower would be a "landmark" for the auto dealers and was an important location designator. Mayor Michael Routh called it "a glowing monolith," and Planning Commission Chairman Rick Karleen and Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan questioned how the city could approve the "sign" while asking other businesses to lower their's.

Councilman Dennis Beltram argued the clock tower "was not a sign in the sense Long's (sign) is." Councilman Jerry



The proposed site of Capitola's Auto Row.

Clarke agreed, saying the "uniqueness" of the site could warrant the clock. Reece said the clock tower would not be visible from adjacent Highway 1 due to the depression of the site, which slopes downward toward Soquel Creek.

City officials decided to withhold final judgment until seeing detailed drawings. As far as Soquel Creek is concerned, however, they definitely didn't like the project plans to drain run-off surface water into the creek.

Planning Commissioner Bill Fisher questioned those plans, advocating instead onsite detention basins. Project architect Herb Ichikawa replied they wanted to avoid onsite detention. He also said a series of filtering systems were proposed to insure gas and oil would not drain into Soquel Creek.

City Manager Steve Burrell said exist-

ing 41st Avenue drainage facilities were not adequate to handle the auto center's run-off. Councilman Bob Bucher suggested that applicants look at installing drainage lines toward 41st Avenue in anticipation of future improvements to handle the extra flow. Mayor Routh called the drainage question "a major concern."

Planning Commissioner Marilyn Crenshaw had concerns over proposed landscaping improvements. She advocated the use of "turf-block" — where grass is planted between concrete — to break up the expanse of pavement. As proposed, 73.5 percent of the site or 306,909 square feet is to be made up of paved parking areas and roads.

Fisher, however, said he could imagine "lots of dead grass." Routh suggested that turf-block be considered only in front display areas where cars are showcased.

In regards to landscaping, Routh also suggested raising a planned eight-foot-high masonry wall to 10 feet. The wall is planned to be built between three of the auto dealers' property that abuts Loma Vista Estates Mobile Home Park.

Other planned mitigation measures included for the benefit of mobile home park residents involve filtered paint spray booths to control air quality and prohibition of outside public address speakers on the lots for noise control.

The draft environmental impact report is about halfway through its 45-day public review period. Comments are still being accepted.

The proposed project includes four Santa Cruz auto dealers. Dealer number one, to be located closest to 41st Avenue, is Marina Pontiac-Cadillac-Buick. It is proposed to take 120,619 square feet. Santa Cruz Porsche-Audi-Isuzu will be adjacent, encompassing 94,992 square feet.

Santa Cruz British Subaru-Jaguar-Triumph is proposed at 69,524 square feet. Roy Baldwin Oldsmobile-AMC is proposed closest to the Wharf Road portion of the site. It is the largest dealership, encompassing 132,314 square feet.