

A nice surprise

Developer agrees project should be reduced

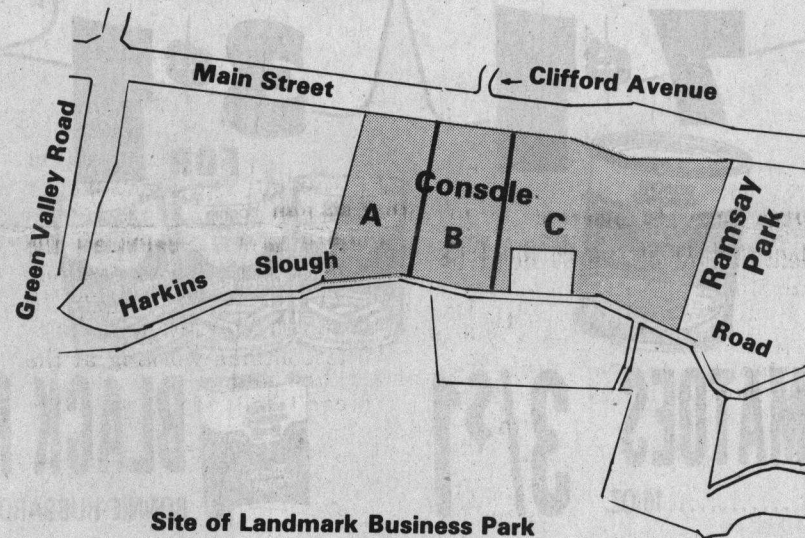
By NANCY BARR
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The Watsonville Planning Commission had a nice surprise last night: A developer agreed without argument to scale down a project in accord with suggestions by the city staff.

A representative of Struve-Console Farms said the city planning staff had presented a "compelling" report, and that there was no reason to pursue the larger project. Scott Lefaver said the staff report was "logical" and Struve-Console wanted to go along with it.

Struve-Console owns 35½ acres just north of Ramsay Park, between Main Street and Harkins Slough Road. (Wells Fargo Bank holds a trust deed on the property as part of Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. financing arrangements. Mort Console, owner of Watsonville Canning, is also president of Struve-Console Farms.)

Struve-Console had asked for a General Plan amendment and rezoning to allow for 14.7 acres of commercial development and 12.6 acres of high-density residential development. Under that proposal, the rest of the land would be left open except for the part that would accommodate the Landmark Parkway, to provide access to the nearby Landmark Business



Struve-Console zoning: A is open space, B is commercial, C is medium-density residential. Landmark Parkway will run through the commercial part of the property.

Park.

The planning staff suggested a less intense use of the land, while still allowing more commercial development than the 5.4 acres allowed in the General Plan. The staff suggested, instead, designating 8.7 acres of commercial and 17.5 acres of medium-density residential.

"We feel the 14.7 acres of commercial is excessive," planner Maureen Owens said,

"and that the traffic generated by a project that size is excessive."

In a written report to the Planning Commission, the staff said that under Struve-Console's proposal, the commercial development could be even bigger than nearby Watsonville Square.

Nevertheless, Owens explained there was good cause to increase the commercial

zoning to some degree from what is specified in the city's General Plan to make the project more practical. Because of the slough and slopes on the property, it wouldn't be feasible to build much of a commercial development on the five acres so designated, Owens said.

Regarding the change from high-density residential to medium-density residential, Owens said medium density is more consistent with neighboring residential development.

Representing Struve-Console Farms, Lefaver spoke to the Planning Commission just long enough to say the staff had a good idea, and that the commission should approve the scaled-down version of the project.

Although the planning staff was aware of Struve-Console's change of heart, Lefaver took the commission by surprise.

"Frankly, I'm shocked," Commission Chairman Nat Bua said. "I'm delighted, too."

Bua said he had expected the public hearing on the Struve-Console project to attract a large crowd, but no one other than Lefaver testified.

Lefaver's comments were all the commission needed to hear to take swift action, approving the staff's proposal unanimously.