

La Selvans balk at church plans

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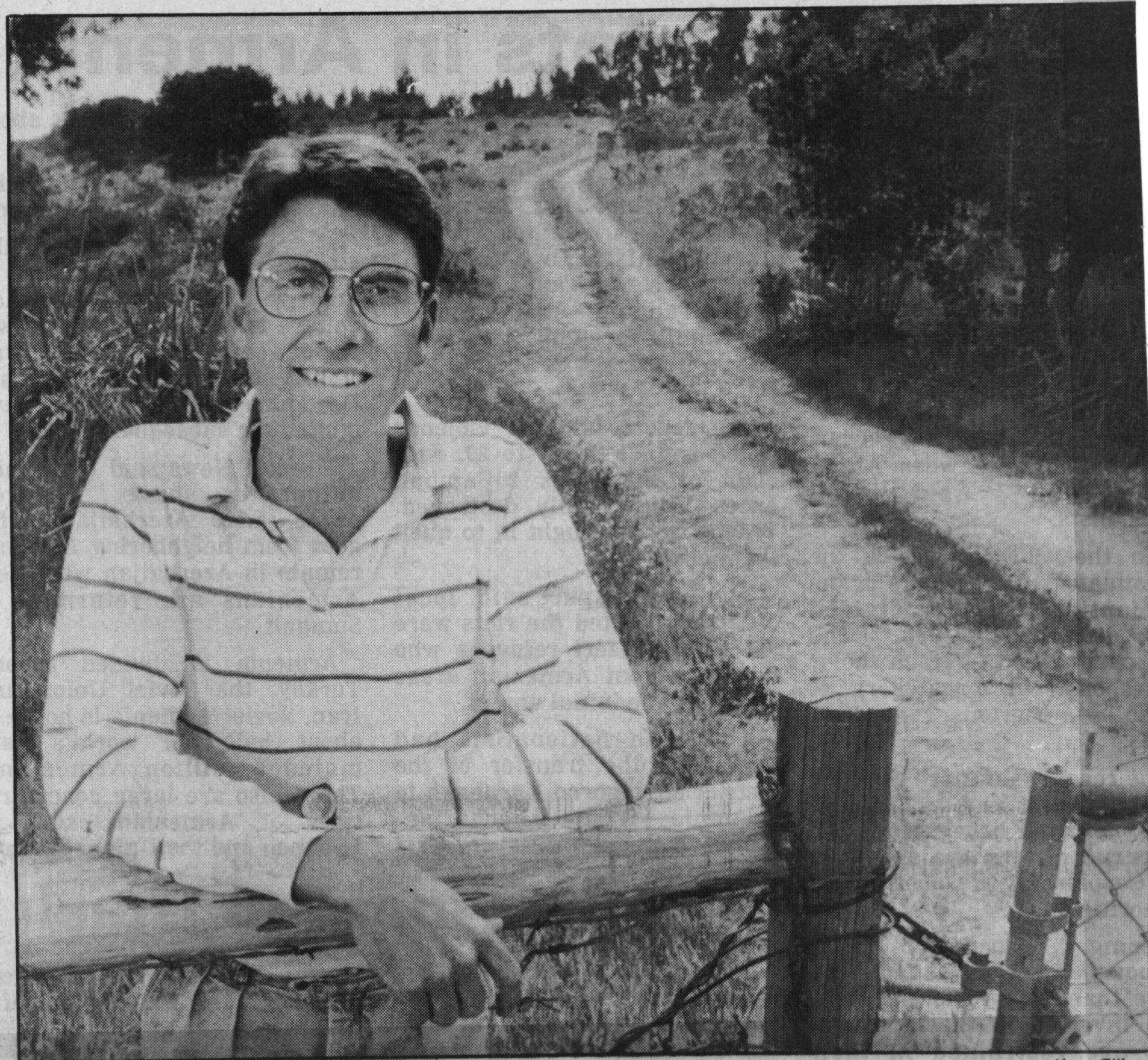
A church's application to build a 27,292-square-foot sanctuary, Sunday School and office complex near the freeway in La Selva Beach has drawn opposition in the community, even before the first public hearing on the project.

Aptos Foursquare Church, also known as the Coastlands, wants to build on a 6.3-acre site off La Selva Drive, the frontage road to the freeway. The application was submitted to the county Planning Department March 18.

The Coastlands, which took its name from a passage in the book of Isaiah which means "desirable spot or habitable location," has been renting space at Cabrillo College for its two Sunday services, which draw 500 to 600 people, including Sunday school.

Opponents of the application say the project is far too big for the community.

La Selva Beach "is a bedroom community," said Irene Young, an organizer of a group circulating a petition opposing the church. "The intensity of the project is too large" for the community, she said.



Kurt Ellison

Pastor Brown on land where church wants to build complex.

Young said she and other opponents have gathered 600 signatures on petitions without a concerted effort.

At their April 21 meeting, members of the La Selva Beach Improvement Association will discuss the church project and decide whether the association will support or oppose it.

Coastlands officials say that because of its proximity to the freeway, the church project won't have much impact on the La Selva Beach community.

"We're not affecting the town of La Selva Beach," said Steve Blackwell, the church's building committee chairman and a real estate agent for Kendall, Potter and Mann in Aptos.

Daniel Brown, the church's pastor, believes the project should be considered as something that affects a region, not just La Selva Beach. Although there are more from Midcounty than any other area, the church's members come from all over the county, he said.

The Coastlands, which submitted a preliminary application to the county last September, made several

revisions before submitting the final application last month.

Some of those revisions came after the church met with La Selva Beach residents at two meetings early this year.

The building area was reduced by 2,000 square feet, a six-foot berm was added along the side of the property to help block the view, and the Sunday school building was reduced from two stories to one.

The Coastlands now has an option to buy 6.3 acres of a 12-acre site owned by Sarah Collins. To build a church, it will need a lot split, rezoning (from 12 acres per unit to six), a commercial development permit, and permits to build in the coastal zone.

The current plans include a 4,542 square-foot building for offices and meeting rooms, a 16,064 square-foot sanctuary and a 6,686 square-foot building for Sunday school.

If the project is approved, it will take two to six years for everything to be built, Brown said, admitting that two years "would be a miracle."

Don Bussey of the county planning staff said the proposed site "has some problems," that will have to be worked out if the church is to be built. Among the concerns, Bussey said, are traffic patterns and how visible the project is from nearby homes and roads.

Church had rapid growth

In a little more than three years, the Aptos Foursquare Church has grown from a handful of people in Pastor Daniel Brown's living room to attendance of 500 to 600 people every Sunday.

The famous evangelist of the 1920s and '30s, Aimee Semple McPherson, founded Foursquare Gospel Church, but Pastor Brown said the church does not follow the teachings of any one person.

Brown, 34, who had been an associate pastor at

Church on the Way, a Foursquare Gospel Church in the San Fernando Valley, came to Santa Cruz County with the intent of building a church. He was familiar with the county from childhood visits to his grandparents' home in Ben Lomond.

There's a heightened increase in churchgoing in general, Brown said, and he believes Santa Cruz County is "underchurched."

The parent church, which

encourages formation of new congregations, provided financing for the first six months of the church's operation.

Foursquare is a Pentecostal, theologically conservative church, whose members believe in speaking in tongues (but not in public).

Brown said the church is "studiously apolitical."

The church now rents office space at 9057 Soquel Drive in Aptos.