

Planning
1990-2000

Scott David Brennan

Granite Construction bulldozers began contouring land at the future site of the Outlook Shopping Center east of Crossroads Shopping Center. Three groups that have sued to prevent construction are considering an appeal of a judge's ruling against them.

Work begins at contested mall site

By SCOTT DAVID BRENNAN
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — The city of Watsonville has issued a grading permit to developers of the proposed Outlook Shopping Center even as environmentalists and their allies consider appealing a court order that allows the development to go ahead.

Two bulldozers were roaring around the swampy ground at the future site of the Outlook Shopping Center this morning, attempting to smooth out muddy slopes.

The grading is the first step in building what would be Watsonville's largest shopping center, located east of the Crossroads Shopping Center between Main Street and Harkins Slough Road.

Developer Don Orosco received a grading permit from the city Friday, and began the work Monday.

"We're basically weatherizing the site and getting it ready for construction," Orosco said today.

The property has a loose clay soil, so the developer is adding sand and a lime treatment to toughen up the ground, better suiting it for construction. The grading and soil treatment should be complete in a couple of weeks, Orosco said.

Three groups sued in Santa Cruz Superior Court to stop the development, but a ruling by Judge Sam Stevens in November gave Orosco the go-ahead. The three groups — Wetlands Watch, the Watsonville Committee for Human Rights and the Committee for Local Business Preservation — have two weeks to file an appeal.

Keith Sugar, an attorney representing the three groups, said an appeal is being seriously considered, but no decision has been made. The groups have said they are fighting the development to stop urban sprawl, save the wetlands, and prevent downtown shops from losing business to the

new project.

Neither Interim City Manager Carlos Palacios nor Building Official Dave Williams were available this morning to comment on the city issuing the grading permit.

Orosco called the lawsuits ludicrous, saying the project "will employ several hundred people" in a community experiencing 21 percent unemployment.

Plans are for the shopping center to be built on a 37-acre tract, with 278,000 square feet of retail space representing an investment of about \$55.6 million, Orosco said. There will also be about nine acres reserved for wetlands habitat, he added.

A Safeway grocery store, Staples office supply, Target general merchandise store, Longs drug store, McDonald's, Burger King, and a gas station are among the future tenants. The Outlook already has 85 percent of its retail space leased, Orosco said.

The developer called the project a "power center," saying, "The center is really suited for consumer tastes of the '90s, attracting the widest possible shopping tastes from around the area."