



by David Klein

Addressing the ongoing saga of the proposed Brown Ranch retail center, the Capitola City Council at its January 10 meeting approved the project's final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) after an addendum listing additional mitigation measures was included.

During the three-hour long public hearing, many local residents continued to voice strong opposition to the proposed 130,000 square foot center, which would be located on Clares Road directly across from J.C. Penny and directly adjacent to a residential neighborhood.

"This [retail center] is clearly unneeded, unnecessary, inappropriate, and should not be built," said Mary Ann Alexander, a local resident.

Many similar comments brought cheers from the audience.

By certifying the EIR, the council accepted that the report was completed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements. The council will now consider the EIR information in making a decision whether or not to approve the project.

The approval of the EIR came only after its scope was expanded when the County of Santa Cruz sued in court over concerns that the project will heavily impact traffic in areas outside the City of Capitola, especially in Live Oak.

The final EIR and its attached addendum addressed mitigation measures for these concerns and other traffic mitigations within Capitola.

Included were a widening to four lanes of Capitola Road between 30th and 17th Avenues, to coincide with the reconstruction of the intersection at 17th Avenue and Capitola Road.

Other measures centered around mitigating noise from the retail center, especially from early morning delivery trucks and parking lot sweepers; decreasing the height of parking lot lighting; and revising the landscape plan to minimize visual impacts on

the adjacent residential area, and using plants that will be drought tolerant.

Presently, many of the existing trees bordering the proposed buffer zone are dying or dead due to a lack of adequate water supplies. A drip irrigation system is planned for the new landscaping.

The city council continued discussion of the project approval until its January 24 meeting, but some residents at the meeting stated that the city has already decided to give the project a stamp of approval. In 1986, the city signed a development agreement for the property with the Browns.

Opposition to the project continues to be directed from two major sources: adjacent residents who feel their quality of life will be severely impacted, and Santa Cruz County, which according to County Attorney Dwight Herr, wants a contribution from Brown or the City of Capitola to help pay for road improvements needed outside the city limits.

City Councilman Michael Routh asked Herr if the widening of Capitola Road would take place concurrent with the completion of the Brown retail center if Capitola or the Browns made a contribution.

"Depending on the amount of the contribution," replied Herr.

When asked if redevelopment funds were available for the project, Herr said that at this time no funds were available and that under county financing it could take 5-7 years to collect the \$5 million needed to improve Capitola Road.

Herr, and Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beautz, both requested the City make this contribution a condition of project approval. Under the county fee schedule for new construction, the developers would have to pay \$784,125 toward improvements on Capitola Road.

Herr suggested a \$300,000 contribution as being reasonable, based on the percentage increase in traffic that the new retail center will bring to Capitola Road. He also suggested that Capitola and

the county work out a program of reciprocity, in which each would contribute to the other for projects that impact on each other's areas.

Routh continued to question the county's priorities, wondering why the major arterial through Live Oak hadn't been funded yet.

Beautz responded that a great deal of work is needed in Live Oak, and that the first projects, such as 17th Avenue, were prioritized because

voiced opposition to the project.

"We've got houses, you've got commercial developments," Beautz told the council. "There should be some type of transitional zoning between the two."

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About the Brown retail center itself, Beautz said she'd like to see a downsizing of the

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—Jan Beautz, Live Oak Supervisor

they were near schools, and students needed sidewalks and safe bike lanes for transportation.

Beautz, concerned about both the traffic situation and the impacted residents that live within her jurisdiction,

project, more buffering, and more green areas. She urged the council to work with the neighborhood.

"It does not need to be this big."

Although a few area residents supported the retail

center, most continued to vocally oppose it, based on the continuing issues of noise, traffic, and the existing plentitude of retail stores.

"Just how much are people supposed to put up with? This is overkill!" said area resident Dwight Dillon. "Capitola has a reputation for addressing the needs of big business at the expense of the people. Prove them wrong!" he implored the council.

The city council dismissed changes in the center that would be necessary before approval. Councilman Ron Graves suggested that parking be put in the rear.

Councilman Jerry Clarke wanted to see the green buffer zone between the center and adjacent residents be increased from ten to 15 feet. Mayor Stephanie Harlan agreed, saying the zone should be up to 20 feet wide and well planted.

Councilman Bob Bucher said the center should be redesigned so that delivery trucks do not have to drive around to the rear.

"I wouldn't want those trucks in my back yard and that's essentially what they're doing," Bucher said. □

