

Deer Park developers hopeful

An official of the Carl N. Swenson Co. of San Jose, developers of the Deer Park shopping center, expressed frustration on one hand and optimism on the other over the regional coastal commission order halting work on the project.

Mar Dell Casto, leasing manager for Swenson, said his first reaction to the order was "frustration—utter and total." But he added he was "confident that within a short period of time—30 days or so—we're going to get everything worked out" with the commission.

He also added that the delay is going to be a costly one for his firm.

On Wednesday, Ed Brown, regional commission executive director, notified Swenson to stop work because the project came into the coastal zone on Jan. 1 and therefore needed an exemption or permits.

To qualify for an exemption, Swenson must show that substantial work had been started before that date.

Casto said the news came rather suddenly. "We're not local to that area, and we're not aware of many things going on. Suddenly, we got a stop-work order."

He said an exemption for work started before Jan. 1, and permits for the rest of the construction had been applied for "at a substantial cost." He described the change in the coastal law "a new order that is not understood by anyone, especially at the local level."

Casto called the project "50 per cent complete," with some buildings nearly completed, but work on others not yet started.

The pharmacy building, Casto said, "Is the only one I'm sure will qualify for an

exemption. We're hoping to get the market qualified, but we'll have to wait and see."

As to what constitutes "substantial work" that would qualify parts of the project for an exemption, Casto said, "I've had a lot of legal definitions and case histories thrown at me (by the commission), none of which make any sense.

"It's about whatever they think it is," he said.

Casto said that \$500,000 had been spent on site preparation before Jan. 1. "How do you apportion that out?," he asked. "But they don't count site work or footings" when determining how much work had been done on a phase of the project before Jan. 1.

The delay, Casto said, "is going to cost me a good \$50,000. And it's going to cost me the use of an extremely good framing crew (carpenters) for that time. It's going to cost everybody."

The road has not been an easy one for Swenson since the project started. They have been other procedural delays which has put the opening of the center much later than originally intended.

Choosing his words very carefully, Casto said, "The county is extremely conservative in its approach to design review and architectural concepts." But he hastily added, "They have also shown a great willingness to work with us on a great many things."