

Planning
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Environmental report OK'd for biggest industrial park

By NANCY BARR

If the proposed Landmark Industrial Park is to be built, homes will have to be found not only for the employees that would work there, but also for a native California plant that would lose its home to the development.

The final environmental impact report (EIR) for that project — which, if built, would be the county's largest industrial park — was approved by the Planning Commission last night, on a vote of 5-0. Commissioner Tony Campos disqualified himself from the discussion and vote because he owns property in the area of the proposed project; Commissioner Dana Sales was absent.

Included in the EIR are concerns of whether there will be enough housing available for the estimated 5,150 people who might eventually be employed in the industrial park, and how to lessen the damage to the Santa Cruz Tarplant, which is native to the area.

The Heritage Development Corporation is seeking permission to build the industrial park on 110 acres of a 156-acre area east of the freeway along the yet-to-be-built Errington Road extension.

There are no arrangements

yet as to what tenants would move into the park, but the zoning in the area would allow for research and development, warehouses, and various forms of manufacturing.

Marc Papineau of Earth Metrics, the firm that prepared the EIR, told the Planning Commission the estimate of 5,150 employees at the industrial park is probably high, but because it is unknown exactly what businesses will operate in the park, it was impossible to be more precise in predicting how many jobs the development will generate.

The number of employees is important when figuring out how many new homes will be needed, he said.

Many of those future employees already live in this area, Papineau said, and the city should be able to provide housing for those that move into the area for the new jobs.

The city's own account of land now zoned residential and land that is expected to be

annexed to the city shows more than enough land for the houses needed for anyone who may move to Watsonville to work in the new industrial park, Papineau said.

The EIR also addresses the fact that the Landmark Industrial Park would be built on one of the few sites where the Santa Cruz Tarweed still grows. The solutions offered in the EIR are to preserve the tarweed within the development or to move the tarweed to another site.

A spokesman for the Santa Cruz Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, Roy Buck, said he is opposed to moving the tarweed.

"Transplantation of wild populations of rare and endangered plants is uncertain," Buck said. "The only acceptable mitigation measure would be

complete preservation intact of the area recognized as a (tarweed) habitat."

This led to an argument between Buck and City Attorney Don Haile.

"Does the Santa Cruz Tarplant have any economic, agricultural or social benefit?" Haile asked.

"That one can immediately identify, no," Buck responded. "I don't know if this is the place to discuss the value of preserving native plants."

Haile said he believed farmers see the tarweed as a pest, and have often tried to eradicate it from their rangeland because cows get sick if they eat it.

"From my understanding of the tarplant," Haile said to Buck, "You're defending cancer."

Planning Commissioner Erle Byer also asked Buck if he or the Native Plant Society were planning to buy the property if the developer can't build because of the tarplant. Buck said they do not, but are merely asking for compliance with state laws calling for lessening the impact of development on endangered species.

According to the EIR, to preserve the tarplant as suggested by Buck, 25 acres of the development would have to be set aside, creating what city planner Bud Lortz called a "mountain" in the middle of the project.

On other issues, the EIR indicates the project must include certain measures to prevent flooding, substantial traffic improvements in the area, and would require substantial grading.

A four-lane road is also planned to be constructed through the industrial park, and that road will be a main subject of discussion at a study session to be held by the City Council at 7:30 tonight at City Hall. The owners of the property in the area have been invited to tonight's meeting.

REFERENCE

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