

County plan for Live Oak: more parks, fewer homes

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SANTA CRUZ — Buried within the 300-page draft of the county's updated general plan lies the future of Live Oak.

The draft plan calls for less housing, more businesses, more parks and open space, and the widening of the community's main streets, said County Planner John Warren.

"Everything outlined sounds great, but I want to see it first," said Georgia Ackley, president of the Live Oak Community Association.

Ackley and other Live Oak residents will be able to learn more about the draft plan and its accompanying environmental impact report during a meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Del Mar School multipurpose room, 1959 Merrill St.

A map showing what land use is proposed for each parcel in Live Oak will be displayed at the meeting.

Live Oak residents are getting this up-close look at the county plan, which addresses all unincorporated communities, because they have been working for over a year on a plan for their own community.

The county's general plan must be adopted before the more detailed community plan is written, explained County Planner John Warren. The general plan contains much of what residents have expressed

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they want for their community, he said.

"I approached this with trepidation because Live Oak was kind of a mess with its confused development pattern," Warren said.

"We think with the community plan, we can rationalize development with quality residential areas, with adequate commercial services, adequate parks, and substantial open space areas."

For years, Live Oak was known as the dumping ground for much of the county's high-density housing. The general plan, Warren said, reflects the community's desire to have less of this type of development.

The draft plan calls for 900 fewer housing units in Live Oak than the existing plan, which was adopted in 1980.

Live Oak currently has 11,598 housing units. Under the existing plan, another 2,351 would be built. The new plan would add only 1,430 housing units, mostly single-family homes, Warren said.

If all the parks shown in the plan are developed, even fewer housing units would be built, said Warren. "We are proposing more parks because we don't have enough even for the population that exists now," he said.

Currently, 66.3 acres are designated in Live Oak for small, neighborhood parks. The draft plan adds 48.4 more acres.

Some 15.5 acres now exist for larger community parks, including the site on 17th Avenue for the regional swim center. The draft plan calls for 17.9 more acres, including the harbor entrance at Brommer Street and 7th Avenue.

However, this is still much less than the 60-89 additional acres needed for the population of Live Oak, Warren said.

"We are looking for additional sites. One property that looks like a possibility is at the upper end of Santa Cruz Gardens at Thurber and Katherine lanes," he said.

The draft plan also shows more regional parks. It proposes the purchase of the privately owned Sunny Cove Beach at 16th Avenue and East Cliff Drive.

The former Albatross Restaurant site at Corcoran Lagoon and overlooks along East Cliff Drive are shown as regional parkland, as well as more open space along Rodeo Gulch, Schwan Lake and Arana Gulch.

Responding to residents saying they wanted more shopping in their community, the plan calls for retail shopping centers, said Warren.

One would be located at 17th Avenue and Capitola Road, where Live Oak Super is located, and another at the site of the Skyview Drive-in on Soquel Drive.

Steve Mendelsohn, vice president and acting president of the Live Oak Business Association, however, isn't convinced the community needs more retail.

"It would be nice to have, but I don't know if there are enough people in this community to support it," said Mendelsohn, the owner of Santa Cruz Optical House. "Small businesses today are being hurt and survival is the answer."

Getting to and from the new parks and shopping centers should be easier if streets are widened, as the plan proposes. It calls for widening Capitola Road to four lanes with left turn lanes, 7th Avenue to three lanes, and 17th Avenue from East Cliff Drive to the railroad tracks to three lanes.

The plan also calls for traffic lights at all major intersections and a carpool lane on Highway 1 from Highway 17 to Rio Del Mar.