

# Beach plan hearings extended

## SC council agrees to hear further testimony on project

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Underlying another long night of testimony on the beach-area plan Thursday was the question of whether it was all for naught.

Almost 300 residents attended the public hearing, continued from Tuesday, regarding a plan that could lead to expansion of the Boardwalk and renovation of some residential areas. By 11 p.m. the City Council, which many accused of having already made up its mind, had not come to a decision on the plan after listening to roughly 45 people and asking questions of city staff and consultants.

With almost as many residents still wanting to speak, the council — after about 45 minutes of wrangling with one another — agreed to extend public testimony to Oct. 1. They hope to make a decision on the Beach and

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Beach-area plan foes tied a goat to a sign that cites opposition to the proposal by eight former Santa Cruz mayors.

## Beach plan

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South of Laurel Area Plan on Oct. 6.

"I'm really tired of having this argument over how long people should speak," said a frustrated Mayor Celia Scott as the council argued and debated about length of speaking time and limiting resident testimony. "This debate (over testimony) is going beyond the bounds of anything I've seen. I think if you have this many who want to speak, let them do so."

While the majority of the council originally rejected allowing public testimony continue to another meeting, members eventually relented.

Opponents say the expansion would bring traffic, impact the environment and needlessly displace some residents in 1,200-person Beach Flats neighborhood.

At various times over the past 10 years, the city has worked on different parts of the plan, which covers 205 acres. City officials and supporters argue the plan is needed because it provides a blueprint for future residential and commercial growth. They also argue that the Beach Flats neighborhood and surrounding businesses will continue to deteriorate without better planning.

Supporters point out that each project within the plan area must still go through another planning process That means receiving Planning Commission and City Council approvals, as well as new environmental-impact reports.

The atmosphere before and during the meeting was more reserved than Tuesday's meeting, which drew 600 people, though opponents still held large signs and handed out fliers while supporters wore green "Beach Plan YES" pins.

Several speakers, however, pointed out that the public hearings may be for nothing, since there is a perception that the council already has at least four of seven members ready to vote yes. Those four include Cynthia Matthews, Mike Rotkin, Michael Hernandez and Scott Kennedy.

Matthews, Rotkin and Kennedy listed their names on a recent newsletter supporting the plan put out by the Coalition for the Beach Area. Hernandez, who is aligned with those three, is listed on the newsletter as "arranging" tours for the plan area.

"This seeming endorsement by City Council members seems to negate the value of public input," said resident Jane Podesta, who opposes the plan, "and in my mind this isn't the correct process."

Council members have stated previously, however, that they too have questions about the plan and will take into account all comments.

If on Oct. 6 the council does vote for approval, that is not the end of the debate, according to members of the Beach Area Working Group, the leading organizer against the plan.

Doug Rand, a group leader, said members will circulate a petition for a referendum on the plan. The group would need the signatures of 10 percent of city voters — or about 3,400 signatures — to put the issue to a vote.

Rand said the group is also considering a lawsuit on grounds the city violated state environmental laws by stating development would not have a significant impact on harbor seals at the mouth of the San Lorenzo

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River; the California Coastal Commission said the beach plan "will adversely impact not only access to the coast, but the character of the community;" and that the city is violating redevelopment law relating to housing relocation.

"No one wants to put the city through that, but we feel there are a lot of problems with the plan and the council needs to look at that."

The project includes realigning Third Street, expansion of the Boardwalk, new affordable housing while removing some current homes, a 3-acre park, two-way bike paths along Beach Street, and a shuttle system.

Much of the discussion during the meeting, and over the past few months, has surrounded the Beach Flats neighborhood, generally bordered by Beach Street to the west, Riverside Avenue to the north and Third Street to the south and east.

For one of the few times during public testimony, the council heard from a resident of Beach Flats, who told the council she is opposed to the plan.

"Most of the people who spoke don't come from my neighborhood," said Tricia, who would not give her last name. "Those people go home to nice homes and posh jobs while I have to put earplugs in at night so I can sleep. Why does it take the Boardwalk to get affordable housing?"

The woman spoke of her daughter, whom she said she sent to live with her grandmother out of state because the teen had gotten involved with drugs and was not getting the life she deserved.

"I stand here with a broken heart," she said. "You should have put housing in a long time ago."

While the woman was opposed to the plan, others said it's examples like that that show new housing and redevelopment is needed.

Some facts about the Beach Flats, according to the beach area plan.

- In 1996, 38 percent of all felony arrests in the city occurred in the Beach Flats area. As a result, the city established a beach beat and assigned six officers to the area. Due to that police focus, felony arrests decreased to 19 percent of the city's total in 1997.

- 27 years ago, home ownership in Beach Flats was more than 70 percent, with about 436 total people living there. In 1997, there are only five residential homeowners (less than 1 percent), but more than 1,200 people living there.

- Rents in the mostly studio and one-bedroom units there range from \$585 to \$800, although 60 percent of the 305 households in the area have three to eight people living in them. The city average is 2.5 people per household.

- 56 percent of all the property in Beach Flats is owned by 14 individuals, 12 of whom live outside Santa Cruz.