

Bonny Doon

Relay tower worries

SJMN

DEC 08 1993

Bonny Doon

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

The Santa Cruz County Planning Commission is expected to decide next week whether a communications company may erect an 80-foot tower in a rural Bonny Doon neighborhood to provide cellular phone service to parts of the San Lorenzo Valley.

GTE Mobilnet wants to set up a transmitting and receiving station on the 46.7-acre Crest Ranch

Christmas Tree Farm in Bonny Doon. The site is off the east side of Empire Grade Road, on top of a ridge above Boulder Creek.

The proposed station would include a microwave dish and panel antennae, a small, prefabricated equipment building, an emergency generator and a diesel tank. The company says the station is needed to provide cellular phone service to its customers in Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, and

along Highway 236.

"Those areas are presently without any service by GTE," said Megan Matthews, a land use consultant hired by the cellular phone company to obtain the necessary permits. "We are mandated by the FCC to offer service in that area. If we don't, we'll lose our license."

Residents living near the proposed tower site, which is about 1½ miles north of Alba Road,

have objected to the project, citing possible health risks. Opponents also say the proposed tower is incompatible with the surrounding area, which is designated mountain residential in the county's general plan, and that their property values may decline if the station is installed.

In September, the county's zoning administrator agreed with residents that the project would "not harmonize, nor complement

the surrounding neighborhood," and denied a permit application filed by the Matthews Land Company on behalf of GTE Mobilnet. Matthews then appealed to the planning commission to overturn that decision.

Since the appeal was filed in October, a dozen residents of Braemoor Drive, about a half mile from the proposed site, have sent individually signed form letters

See **TOWER**, Page 2B

SJMN

12-8-93

Bonny Doon residents oppose 80-foot relay tower

■ TOWER

from Page 1B

to the county planning department opposing the project.

"The Braemoor Drive tract has approximately 50 parcels, some 40 of which are owner-occupied residential houses," according to the form letter. "Most of the residents are concerned because of the number of children that live in the neighborhood and the unknown long-term health effects of

microwave emissions."

Property owners Fred and Terry Jensen, who have agreed to lease part of their Christmas tree farm to GTE for the project, disagree. The Jensens say they are so convinced the station will not pose a health hazard that they plan to build a home about 400 feet from the tower.

"We looked into it and the risk seems to be very slight," Terry Jensen said. "I'd give up my mi-

crowave oven before I'd worry about that tower."

If the planning commission approves the project, Matthews said, the tower could be up and running in about five months. The company would also be required to get a building permit from Santa Cruz County and receive approval from the Public Utilities Commission, Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Communications Commission.

Last June, GTE Mobilnet got approval to put up a tower in Scotts Valley despite the protests of neighbors. It took the company about a year to get final approval.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Santa Cruz County Planning Commission will meet Wednesday, Dec. 15 at 9 a.m. in the Board of Supervisor's chambers, Room 525 of the County Building.