

Skypark: Scotts Valley prepares for takeoff

Ninety-three acre development in heart of the city

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Some day, a department store, community park, 318 homes and a new school could replace an abandoned airport, lumber mill, sand quarry and auto wrecker.

It's known as Skypark, a major development planned for 93 acres in the heart of Scotts Valley.

In the next few weeks, city officials will consider the final environmental impact report for Skypark. Details such as reducing the impact of additional traffic on surrounding neighborhoods still need to be worked out, but once the report is adopted, Skypark can take off.

"We are looking at a quality project," said City Manager Chuck Comstock. "We want something really creative there because this is our last chance to do something creative in Scotts Valley."

This "quality project" would be built on a plateau

bordered by Mount Hermon Road and Kings Village Drive and in an old sand quarry below the plateau off Lockhart Gulch.

When it will happen depends on a number of factors, including the economy. One retail store and one commercial developer are interested already.

It's been a decade since the city of Santa Cruz closed Skypark Airport because it was losing money.

The Santa Cruz City Council was told then that the 46 acres that served as the airport site was worth \$7 million to \$10 million if developed with light industry and retail stores.

The only problem was that this piece of valuable real estate was surrounded by Scotts Valley. Scotts Valley has made sure it has retained a say over what happens there.

Scotts Valley designated the 93 acres a "special

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Skypark

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treatment area," allowing it under state law to set standards for anything developed there.

At stake is not only land owned by Santa Cruz, but also acreage owned by Harmony Foods, a Santa Cruz-based producer of snack foods known as H&L Partners, and by William Graham. Ten other people also own small parcels in the "special treatment area."

If all goes as planned, the following will happen once the environmental impact report is approved:

- Scotts Valley will annex the airport property.

- Santa Cruz, Harmony Foods and Graham will jointly sell 34 acres of residential land to a housing developer.

- Scotts Valley will buy land from the other property owners for a 17-acre park, 11 acres of open space and a 5.5-acre middle school.

- Scotts Valley would have five years to find a firm to buy and develop 26 acres designated for commercial use. If no developer is found, the land would revert to the property owners.

"The city wants this option so it can bring in a comprehensive, commercial development," said Comstock.

Scotts Valley has formed a redevelopment agency, which governs the Skypark area, to help pay for projects planned by the city, including the \$9.9 million park.

When property-tax revenues increase in the redevelopment area, the city receives part of these revenues. Fees paid by developers also will help pay for Skypark improvements.

Since the Scotts Valley school district lost future property-tax revenues when the redevelopment agency was formed, the city promised in return to provide a school site at Skypark.

A large part of Skypark is to be privately developed. Working with the major property owners, the city has put together a plan for the 93 acres showing where everything will be located.

Stores are planned along Mount Hermon Road. Stores also would be built along one side of a new road running through Skypark from the intersection of Lockwood Lane and Mount Hermon Road to Kings Village Drive.

The city intends to bring in a "draw" store that would increase business in existing stores and keep shoppers from going "to Valley Fair or Capitola Mall," said Mayor Joe Miller.

"We have to have a department store of some sort," Miller said. "We've talked about a large furniture and appliance store of some sort. We'd like to attract a large electronics store" such as The Good Guys.

"The city would have a say as to

what store would go in there. We wouldn't specifically say what store, but we would set some limits as to what kinds of stores," Miller added.

The city's policy is that new commercial development at Skypark should complement existing stores, although John Allard of the real estate firm of Blickman Turkus wonders if this is restraint of trade.

One of Allard's clients, a national retail store, is interested in Skypark. Allard said he received no support from city officials, who told him there were similar stores in the area.

Allard also has a client interested in doing a master development for the entire commercial piece.

But Skypark won't just be a big shopping center. It also will be a place to call home.

Down below the plateau, in an old sand quarry off Lockhart Gulch Road, a maximum of 56 apartments, condominiums or town houses could be built. If the city decided to build low- or moderate-income units there, the plans allows up to 148 units.

Up on the plateau, along a new street called Skypark Drive, up to 170 single-family homes will be built. All will be right across the street from a 17-acre park.

The Park and Recreation Commission has a vision for the park, based on a survey of a cross-section of the community.

"We are looking at a swimming pool and a community center with multipurpose rooms for crafts, arts, hobbies, and meetings," said Commission Chairwoman Stephany Aguilar.

The park also should have four lighted tennis courts, a playground for small children, a group picnic area, and a skateboard park, she said.

"It is to be integrated with the new middle school, so we are looking at a gymnasium with a weight room, basketball, badminton, and volleyball. We are also looking at a field that would have the capability for softball, soccer, grass volleyball and a running and walking area around it."

"Whether we can come up with the money to construct all these desires is to be seen, but I know the city is committed to purchasing the 17 acres for a park," she said.

Public hearings on the impact report will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday before the Planning Commission at City Hall and before the City Council at 7 p.m. Aug. 12 and 26 at City Hall. Copies of the report are available at City Hall, 1 Civic Center Drive, and at the public library at Kings Village Shopping Center. For more information, call 438-2324.

Skypark master plan

