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Developers eye Green Valley for shopping center

By SUSANNA HECKMAN
STAFF WRITER

A San Mateo development firm is considering building a shopping center on a 14-acre parcel at Green Valley Road and Loma Prieta Avenue in Watsonville.

Gary Ward, one of the four partners in FHK/Ward Co., said that although it may be surprising to some here, Watsonville is "somewhat lacking" in shopping centers.

FHK/Ward has done a marketing study of Watsonville.

"It is our belief that there is truly enough population in Watsonville currently to support added retail, and that in fact, it is needed," Ward said.

Not only has the city grown in that direction in recent years, he said, but it is also unusual for a community to have shopping centers — as Watsonville does — that are 100 percent leased.

The firm has already consulted the Planning Department for information, Ward said. He said it doesn't appear the site is home to any Santa Cruz tarplant, a species that has caused a few developers some headaches.

The project hinges on responses from potential anchor tenants, Ward said.

The developers want to make sure they have commitments from two large retailers before going ahead with purchasing the land and beginning the approval process, he said.

The stores that have been contacted should reply within about a month, he said. He declined to reveal which stores they are.

Meanwhile, another new shopping center — the Barry Swenson project on the 200 block of Main Street downtown — is in the final approval stages as far as the city is concerned, project manager Lisa Bullen said. It should have a building permit within three weeks.

That doesn't mean that construction is necessarily about to begin on the long-delayed project, however, she said.

The major hold-up for the project, which won final design approval from the Watsonville City Council in July, has been financing.