

Ben Lomond Community To Decide On Use Of Land

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Polly and Mike Doyle own a small, but important, piece of property in Ben Lomond—and they want to do something with it.

In fact, they want the Ben Lomond Community—a majority of its people—to have the deciding voice in what that “something” will be.

The property is located along Highway 9 and Fillmore Avenue. It is 1.3 acres in size and under the new general plan, it is zoned C-2, a commercial zoning that allows for a wide range of structures and other uses.

“Simply, what we are going to ask through meetings and a survey, is ‘what do you, as residents of Ben Lomond, want us to do with the property?’” Doyle explained.

He pledged, “We are going to abide by the decision of the people, if the proposed use of the land fits within the ecological constraints and the okay of the planning department.

“There is one other thing, and we feel it is only fair to us and to the community,” Doyle said.

“And, that is, if the community decides that the property should be used for a public park, or other public facility, we will ask that the community purchase the land.

“On the surveys will be the question:

“If you indicated a park or any other public usage as one of your answers would you be willing to support the formation of a special assessment district for self-taxation?”

The survey, itself, will be a product of the Democratic process that is to be employed in planning use for the property.

On Thursday, the public is invited to attend a meeting at Wilder Hall in Ben Lomond at 8 p.m. where the survey and other public participation will be discussed.

The open discussion will be at the regular meeting of the Ben Lomond Business Assn., Doyle said, “as the businessmen have about the only forum in town where something like this can begin.

“But, we want it always understood that it is not just a matter for the village’s organized groups, but a process where every resident can have a say in what they want for their town.”

Doyle’s approach is not quite unique, and he is being helped by the man who first “took planning to the people.”

This man is Bob Marani, who has created the firm of Community Research Institute, and the man who gave the Rio del Mar area a “Deer Park” development that the community itself designed.

And in doing the design, it saved the orchards on the property and only developed “80,000 square feet of the 22 acre parcel,” Marani said.

But, he added, “It was profitable, not to the amount earlier developers had wanted, but fair to the builders, and it gave the community what it wanted.”

Marani involved the community, the Rio del Mar Assn., the area’s general plan review committee, and even took the matter to Aptos High School.

Also, the community planning effort became a study area for UCSC students, and Marani is urging that Doyle’s efforts could also be “audited by UCSC students as a term project.”

Marani’s excitement at “giving planning back to the people” also has a pragmatic side.

“When you finally take your plans, designed and approved by a majority of the community, to the planning commission and the board, the official arguments and the possible constraints are already mitigated.

“They are mitigated, because you can honestly say, ‘this is what the community wants,’” Marani said.

The initial presentation—and one that can be revised by the community voice at Thursday’s meeting—describes Ben Lomond as “an evolving village community” that is slowly proceeding from its traditional home of retirees and summer visitors to a wider social mixture.

Still taking into account, the valley town’s number of second home owners, Doyle and Marani point out that today there is a greater number of commuter residents and a greater mixture of age groups.

They project that from back to 1967 to 1985 Ben Lomond village will have controlled growth as a result of San Lorenzo Valley general plan, the impact of UCSC and Cabrillo College growth, development of the core area (where the Doyles’ property is) and the continued exposure of the beautiful mountain village to visitors.

The goals of the Democratic process that Doyle and Marani have embarked on are to meet the existing needs of the Ben Lomond Community and to plan “now” for future needs.

They say their request to the community to make the planning determination is “planning with different values than in the past.”

Doyle does ask that the planning both “assure fulfillment of the community needs that are ecologically sound and will give an economic return.”

He believes that the community will make a majority statement that is not intended to deprive him of his and Polly’s property with just return.

Marani explained that the community involvement, hopefully, will go far beyond just the recommendations in the survey, and will result in a community planning group throughout the planning and development.

He went as far as to suggest that it would be a good idea if the county would form “commissions” in the small towns in the county.

He and Doyle made a point of saying that many people might feel that a community planning for such a small piece of property (as compared to the Deer Park planning) is not that important. They disagree with that assumption.

Doyle put it, “It is even more important that the process be brought down to cover small pieces of property that are in sensitive areas—it will show how extensively the community can have a real voice in its development.”