

Supervisors kill redevelopment project

By LANE WALLACE
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A proposed Pajaro Valley redevelopment project is dead. Kaput. Finished.

Responding to overwhelming opposition, Santa Cruz County supervisors voted unanimously yesterday to kill the project, which called for up to \$216 million worth of improvements over a 40-year span in the Interlaken and Freedom areas, and along Green Valley Road.

The supervisors' rejection was the last roll of opposition that had been snowballing all month. Nearly 600 people voiced their objections to the project at community meetings in Freedom Nov. 7 and 14, opposition petitions were circulated, and Watsonville-area Supervisor Ray Belgard's office has been getting plenty of phone calls.

Supervisors rejected Redevelopment Agency Administrator Tom Burns' request to delay the

project for a year so he could get another chance to present his case to the people.

"The people are diametrically opposed" to redevelopment, said Belgard, who had supported the

project before the opposition surfaced. He made the motion to kill redevelopment.

About 100 people turned out for yesterday's hearing, reiterating their concerns about the costs and fear that supervisors might misuse the power they would have to control redevelopment spending.

"We're going to trust you for 40 years?" said Watsonville accountant Dan Ukestad. "You're betting on the future. I don't trust 701 Ocean St. (the county Governmental Center.)"

The main incentive for forming a redevelopment project is that two thirds of the funding comes from the state, but that didn't impress Pajaro Valley residents. At the community meetings, they were skeptical of the state's continuing commitment for such funding, and said they weren't interested in spending state money

See KILL page 6 ►

County officials hoped to raise \$216 million

Before opposition mounted, county officials envisioned redevelopment projects in the Pajaro Valley ranging from roads and sewers to libraries and schools.

The list of projects — \$216 million worth in today's dollars — was partly a "wish list" that opponents criticized as being too costly.

Redevelopment Agency Administrator Tom Burns said projects could be dropped, added or delayed over the 40-year life of the redevelopment

project.

The now-dead proposal called for improvements on 12 miles of roadway and 19 miles of added curbs, gutters and sidewalks in the Interlaken and Freedom areas and along Green Valley Road.

Included were plans to widen portions of Freedom and Airport boulevards, put bike lanes on Airport, Green Valley Road, Buena Vista Drive, College Road and Calabasas Road, and install lights on Lakeview Road.

Road improvements were estimated at \$48 million, and curb, gutter and drainage improvements would have cost \$31 million.

State law requires 20 percent of redevelopment money — \$43 million in this case — go for building subsidized housing or rehabilitating existing homes. A report estimated 42 percent of the homes in the targeted areas are 30 years or older and "could require repairs or modernization." Low-interest loans would have been available for such re-

pairs.

The plan called for \$21 million for acquisition and development of parks, including one in the Interlaken area, two small ones in Freedom and two to serve future developments on Buena Vista Drive and Green Valley Road.

Another \$5 million was projected for a library for Freedom, including land cost, and \$6 million for a 10,000-square-foot community center.

—Lane Wallace

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► From Page 1

anyway.

Redevelopment would divert some money from the county's general fund, and some people worried that the county might raise taxes to make up for what's diverted. The people were also concerned about debt — redevelopment agencies commonly sell bonds to finance their projects, depending on increased tax revenue to pay off the bonds.

Doug Kaplan, a vocal opponent of redevelopment, called the supervisors' vote "a victory without joy" because the question of funding road, sewer and drainage improvements is unresolved. Those improvements made up half the redevelopment proposal.

"It's time to explore the alternatives," said Kaplan, suggesting that a small project be done after the most pressing infrastructure (roads, sewers, drainage, etc.) needs are identified by the public and a funding mechanism is agreed on. Belgard said he will

look into forming a citizen committee to study what the people want.

In voting to kill the project, supervisors said funding for infrastructure is limited, and they acknowledged that the public is aware of the limitations. There are no programs for infrastructure improvements that provide the state funding redevelopment does, Burns said.

"We won't have as much money to do as much as we might have" with redevelopment, said Supervisor Gary Patton, who said, "The people don't want it (redevelopment), and, by gosh, I'm going to support the people."

Earlier, Kaplan had criticized the board, particularly Patton, for creating a redevelopment agency in Live Oak and Soquel that has become "a very powerful residential developer" with projects on the 100-acre O'Neill Ranch in Soquel and The Farm restaurant land on Soquel Drive.

Kaplan said that's ironic, because Patton has built a reputation on limiting growth. Supervisors, Kaplan said, seem to be bent on building more subsidized housing, and redevelopment gives "an extraordinarily powerful

means of accomplishing your goals," he told board members. The state requires 20 percent of redevelopment money be spent on subsidized housing or improving existing homes.

Jan Beautz, supervisor for Live Oak-Soquel, defended redevelopment in her district, saying decisions have been based on "consensus-building" at neighborhood meetings.

Redevelopment has also been talked about for Aptos, but it doesn't look as though there will be a proposal anytime soon. In a letter to board members yesterday, Midcounty Supervisor Robley Levy asked that redevelopment consideration for Aptos be delayed until the area's general plan is completed. That process could take a year or more.

In the San Lorenzo Valley, a group of 23 people from various community groups are discussing what projects could go into a redevelopment project.

Burns and Belgard agreed that they should have had smaller community meetings before going to the people with a full proposal.

"We steamrolled too fast," Belgard said.