

Capitola Mall expansion wins important test

7-25-86
By KEITH MURAOKA

Sentinel Staff Writer

CAPITOLA — One small step was taken for shoppers, but a giant leap is still ahead before Capitola Mall is nearly doubled in size.

The Capitola City Council Thursday night voted 4-1 to certify the final environmental impact report for the controversial mall expansion despite numerous concerns.

Some of the concerns reiterated during the hearing — namely increased traffic and the visual impacts to the Lotman Drive/Sommerfeld Avenue neighborhood directly behind the mall — were so serious that Mayor Bob Bucher and Councilman Michael Routh hinted that a proposed second major department store addition may have to be deleted from the expansion or relocated to another portion of the site.

That did little to appease a handful of residents who live in the Sommerfeld Avenue/Lotman Drive area directly behind the mall. They angrily stormed out of the hearing, charging the council only paid them "lip service," and are intent on

"pushing through" the expansion. One resident called it a "cosmetic farce."

Certification of the environmental report does not constitute approval of expansion. It paves the way for the next step in the planning process, specifically the mall expansion plan itself.

No expansion plan as yet has officially come before the city. However, certification of the environmental report tells mall developers that any detrimental environmental impacts from expansion can be mitigated.

That talked-about expansion calls for a near-doubling of the county's only enclosed mall from 378,501 square feet to 759,599 square feet — roughly the size of Oakridge Mall in south San Jose. JC Penney has already committed in the first phase of expansion, while the second major department store — along with a two-story parking garage — is planned for phase two.

Whether or not the expansion even gets to the first phase, however, is still dependent on land negotiations

Please see Page A2

Capitola Mall expansion

Continued from Page A1

between mall developer Cypress Properties and land owner Brown Bulb Ranch.

Routh said that negotiations are continuing and, as yet, an agreement has not been reached. Planning Director Sue Tupper told The Sentinel after the meeting that the expansion plan "could be continued indefinitely," pending conclusion of negotiations.

Lotman Drive/Sommerfeld Avenue area residents were angry and surprised at the council's 4-1 vote for certification of the environmental report. The city's Planning Commission had asked the council to delay certification for at least a month in order for them to get their concerns in writing.

Only Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan voted against, calling for more information for everything from traffic to noise, air pollution and drainage.

Traffic is expected to increase 78 percent if the mall is expanded, generating 28,500 vehicles a day compared to 15,970 now, according to Earth Metrics, the environmental report author. Residents complained that 41st Avenue traffic is a mess now.

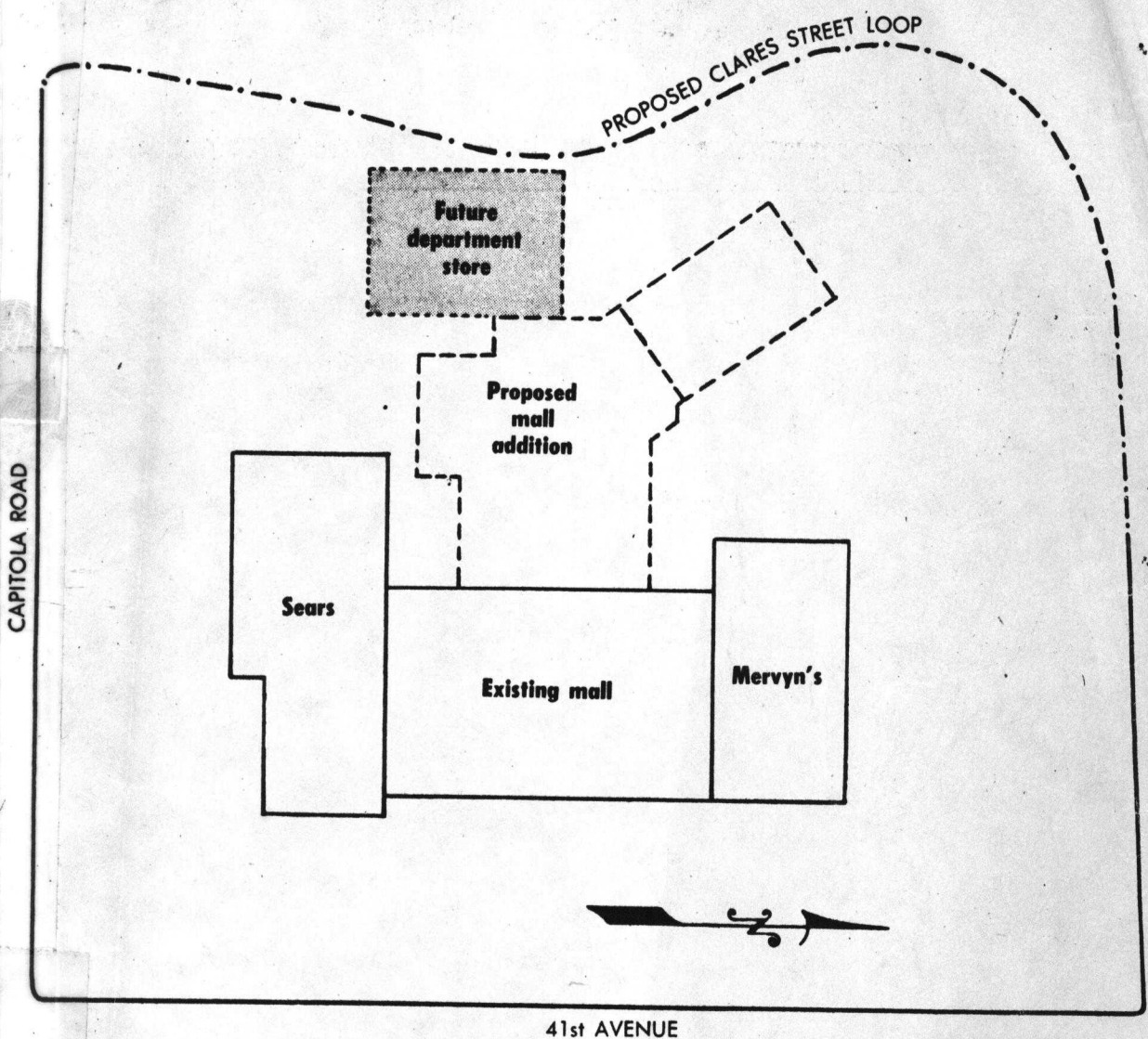
Sommerfeld resident Sherril Gomez maintained, "The other four (council members) just gave us lip service. I doubt their sincerity. I believe they have a preconceived idea of what is going to happen and they're going to push it through no matter what." Neighbor Charles Kurta called the hearing, "a cosmetic farce."

Aptos resident Becky Steinbruner called the council "hypocrites," maintaining Capitola opposes the Wingspread proposal in Aptos due to the increased traffic it would bring but then approves an environmental report on the mall that warns of the same thing.

"Let's not become a little Sar Jose," Sommerfeld resident Janice Kerrick told council members. She reiterated the most often-heard argument by residents, namely the too-close location of the proposed Clares Street Loop to their homes.

The environmental report author calls for the construction of an eight-foot-high masonry soundwall to mitigate noise. However, resident argued the wall would not mitigate increased air pollution or the view they'll have of the second department store.

Council members conceded the eight-foot-high soundwall would



Shaded area shows proposed store which may be removed from plan.

not be adequate. "It sure wouldn't mitigate my concerns if I was a resident there," said Bucher. He called for increasing the height to 10 feet, as well as relocating the loop road at least 200 feet away from residences.

Lee Otter, a resident of Sommerfeld and chairman of the city's Project Area Committee, had called for at least a 100-foot distance between the back of homes and the loop road.

Routh added, "I know I wouldn't be happy if this were built in my back yard." In response, he and Bucher suggested that the planned second major department store might have to be deleted or relocated to another portion of the site.

"When and if we get a specific plan before us, we're going to have to take a hard look," said Routh. "Maybe we're looking at a mall that is too large."

Added Bucher, "Maybe the second department store isn't needed. If not, then the two-story parking structure also won't be needed. That would help some of the traffic problem."

Fellow council members agreed that specific solutions to the environmental impacts should be mitigated at the development stage of the planning process. That didn't stop them, however, at taking swipes at the county.

Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the county Transportation Commission relayed concerns by the county Planning Department. Those concerns called for delaying any project until a "portion" of the money needed to widen both Highway 1 and Capitola Road, from 30th to Seventh avenues into Live Oak, is provided.

The environmental report says that Highway 1 will be over capacity within four years and need to be

widened to six lanes, with or without mall expansion.

Routh maintained that Capitola cannot wait for the county to solve its traffic problems before developing. "It sounds like the county is still crying in their beer that Capitola has the regional shopping center. They see us as some sort of bank account to solve their traffic problems. Perhaps, they should reach into their pockets rather than trying to reach into ours all the time."

Bucher jokingly suggested that instead of widening Capitola Road, Capitola should make it one-way west, toward Capitola. "That would solve our problem and make us a lot of money," he said.

The mayor summed up the councils' feelings that much serious work lies ahead in solving impacts from the future mall expansion. "I feel the EIR is adequate, but the project is not," he said.