

Planning
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Council reaffirms shopping center decision

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The City Council Tuesday night reaffirmed its decision clearing the way for a shopping center at Green Valley Road and Main Street.

The council last week had voted 4-3 to change the General Plan on the 11-acre site from mixed commercial and residential to entirely commercial.

Over the weekend, Councilman Charles Palmtag had urged the council to reconsider its decision, saying that the public and city officials weren't given a chance to adequately review the proposal, which he called a "radical addition" to the General Plan. "We've been had," he remarked.

The developer of the proposed center, Bill Burgstrom, told the council Tuesday night that it wasn't true that the public hadn't had a chance to comment on the project. He noted that four public hearings on the center had been held, and that each of the hearings received extensive coverage from the Register-Pajaronian.

Burgstrom remarked that he was "discouraged" that Palmtag felt the way he did. (Palmtag was not able to attend Tuesday night's meeting.)

But several opponents of the shopping center appealed to the council to change its mind. Ken Miller, chairman of the

Central Business Improvement District, said that two weeks ago the council indicated it was "somewhat baffled" about redevelopment plans, but now it acted as if it knew exactly what it was doing in moving ahead with the shopping center.

Miller said he wouldn't object to the center if "the facts" showed that it wouldn't severely damage the downtown. "Take the overall thing together," he said. "Make sure all the facts are in."

Miller alluded to a remark made last week by Councilman Vido Deretich, who had said "to hell with redevelopment." The pharmacist suggested that the councilman consider stepping down from the Redevelopment Agency if he couldn't support revitalization.

"Give redevelopment a chance to fly," Miller urged. "You just hired a redevelopment director. You can't pull a rug out from under him."

Miller said he was impressed with Palmtag's argument, particularly the comment that "We've been had."

"I kind of feel that way, too," Miller remarked.

Dispersing commercial development throughout the city without rejuvenating the core, argued Hal Hyde of Ford's department store, "is not good planning for the community."

Carlos Rico, owner of La Flor Del Valle grocery store, said the council should seriously consider "how many centers you approve."

"How much (commercial development) can the town absorb?" asked Rico, who said the council should "use up what (land) it has downtown and then start moving out."

"You've been wishy-washy on the General Plan. You never follow it — and always change it," Rico told the council.

Evelyn Nadeau, who lives in the Town and Country district off North Main Street, said the council was "kind of pushing things" by paving the way for a new shopping center. She asked the council "to do a little bit more thinking about what you're doing (to the downtown)."

Councilman Frank Osmer said there seemed to be some confusion over whether the shopping center was a "neighborhood center or a regional center."

Planning Director Bob Ellenwood then

rattled off a list of figures concerning "neighborhood," "community" and "regional" centers. The figures indicated that the proposed 125,000 square foot center (the figure used by Burgstrom Tuesday night) would either be considered a large neighborhood center or a small community center.

Burgstrom pointed out that the Pajaro Valley Shopping Center in Freedom was 145,000 square feet, but was still considered a "neighborhood center."

Only council members Ann Soldo and Betty Murphy expressed much sympathy for the downtown revitalization advocates.

"I personally feel we have too many shopping centers," Mrs. Soldo said. "At this time our community is not in need of another."

Councilwoman Jean McNeil, however, pointed out that the council had approved hundreds of new homes in the North Main Street area. "These people (the

new residents) have a right to have a shopping center," she said.

But Mrs. Murphy noted that the council has zoned a good deal of land commercial at Green Valley Road and Freedom Boulevard. She said she agreed with Palmtag that the city is zoning too much land for commercial purposes.

Mrs. Murphy said she also agreed with the councilman that the General Plan change at Green Valley and Main should be considered separately from the 20 or so General Plan amendments taken up by the council last week.

But Mayor Bill Johnston repeated his argument that "free enterprise" should be allowed to flourish, adding that the city needed additional sales tax revenue. Otherwise, he said, the sales tax will flow outside the city to shopping centers on 41st Avenue and in Salinas.

Mrs. Murphy, however, warned that the city might find itself "dissipating the sales tax" by simply moving shoppers

from one area to another.

In the end, a motion by Mrs. Soldo to keep the Green Valley-Main site zoned primarily residential failed on a 4-2 vote.

The council also formally adopted all the other changes that were made at last week's meeting.

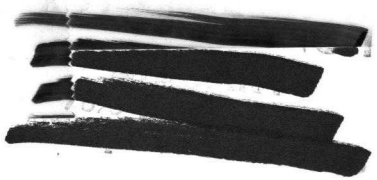
In other business Tuesday night, the council:

— Increased several fees, including sewer and garbage fees. Sewer fees will be increased about 17 percent and residential garbage fees about 13 percent. Mrs. Soldo dissented on the sewer and garbage rate hikes, saying she worried about the effect the rate increases will have on people on a limited income. But the city staff and a few members of the council remarked that the increases amounted to "only pennies," and that the increases were needed to help balance the books.

— Approved "in concept" new fees for fire inspections. Mayor Johnston and Councilwoman Soldo dissented.

— Authorized several job reclassifications recommended by the city staff and the Personnel Commission. John Radin's title, under one change, will be upgraded from administrative services director (finance director) to assistant city manager.

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