

New Design Promises New Life for Aptos Village

Updated Blueprint Integrates Higher Density Commercial and Residential Development

by Aldwin Fajardo

Since 1979, developers have been eying renovating the turn-of-the-century village at the heart of Aptos. Now home to about eight acres of undeveloped property, a 130-year-old hotel and a handful of historic structures, Aptos Village has been calendared for a major facelift.

During the past three decades, after countless public meetings — the latest on Mar. 18 — nothing much has changed, with the notable addition of the Bay Federal building in 2006.

However, this year, Supervisor Ellen Pirie is optimistic however that Aptos is finally getting the makeover it was promised almost 30 years ago.

She said there are less property owners involved this time around in developing a unified plan, eliminating the lengthy process of getting everybody together to agree on the project, particularly the question of who will pay for public infrastructure such as roads, sewer, sidewalks, landscaping, drainage, and traffic improvements.

“We’ve had issues in the past with financing of public facilities in the to-be-developed area because we have to work with numerous property owners. That’s not the case anymore so the process of identifying who would pay for road improvements is basically streamlined,” said Pirie.

Barry Swenson Builder, which owns about 75 percent of the land, has finalized with Thacher & Thompson Architects a new Aptos Village development blueprint. One that is similar to the projects the company has undertaken in Santa Clara County.

“The design we’re working on right now reflects the vision of the community. It’s based

on what the community has envisioned the village to be — modern with touches of Aptos history and free from traffic congestion. The design creates an ideal commercial and residential center,” said architect Matthew Thompson.

Thompson describes the new Aptos Village design as a rich mix of different architectural elements including modern and historic buildings such as the old apple barn and the Bayview Hotel.

Thompson’s design incorporates a plaza, a skateboard park near the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, existing merchants, and residential and commercial structures. He said it’s a master plan that will be strikingly functional, environmentally sustainable and highly accessible.

The plan includes construction of 17 new buildings including 60 new residential units, one-bedroom flats, townhouses and work-live flats all

areas are within easy reach,” said Hibble.

He added that many people look to lifestyle as well as the proximity to job location as an indication of where to reside.

“The amazing balance between work and pleasure now proves to be the key to a modern and mobile society,” he said. “People’s lives and environment are closely connected. The work, living and public areas must be planned and designed according to the

members of the labor force, higher than the national average of 63.9 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau which also reported that Aptos residents commute to work longer at 30.4 minutes compared with the national average of 25.5 minutes.

Unemployment rate in Aptos is 5.2 percent, with job growth of 1.39 percent. Employment is expected to grow by 21.11 percent over the next 10 years, partially spurred by commerce anticipated to thrive in the modernized Village.

Hibble said the proposed development to the Village would help make the area more conducive to business growth, as well as reduce commercial dependency on areas outside of Aptos.

“At its present state, the Village cannot support growth in investments,” he said.

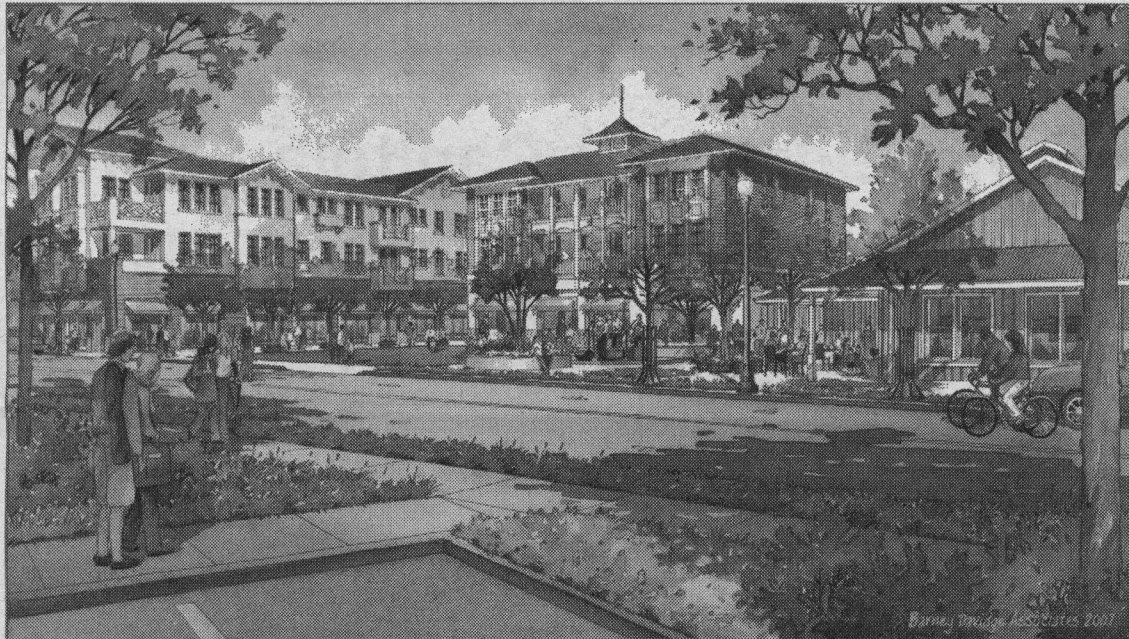
Pirie Touts Revision of Outdated Plan

Supervisor Pirie said the county’s planning department staff has been tasked to modernize the Aptos Village Plan, which was first drafted in 1979 and was last updated in 1985. She noted the need to revise the antiquated plan to reflect inputs from the community gathered in a series of public meetings since 2002.

A series of community meetings were held beginning in the fall of 2002 and throughout 2003 to consider the future of Aptos Village.

Community members, business representatives and planning staff gathered over a series of more than 12 meetings to outline issues such as traffic, housing, shopping, parking and a town plaza.

The vision includes the area along Soquel Drive between Aptos Creek Road and Trout



Architectural rendering from the parking lot at Post Office Drive looking across Soquel Drive. The building at far right is currently PrintSmith.

“It’s more like a traditional village in a modern world minus the traffic and pollution,” he added.

Construction is started to begin in 2010 and completed in 24 months.

A Masterplanned Community Development

Project manager Ricardo de la Cruz calls the portion of the Aptos Village that will emerge north of the Bayview Hotel a masterplanned community.

“Think of it as a true craftsman development,” he said, referring to the architectural style that was first made popular in England.

totaling 75,000 square feet, along with a 51,000-square-foot trade and business center.

Aptos Chamber of Commerce co-director John Hibble said nothing compares to living within a masterplanned village where business, commercial, and residential areas are not only all integrated, but also well thought out.

“There is nothing like having your own home with all of your family’s desired features and amenities. The new design makes the Aptos Village an ideal location to bring back quality in people’s lives, as it will soon become a location where commercial and leisure

users’ way of life. The new design offers freedom for a comfortable and ideal lifestyle.”

More Employment Opportunities

With the construction of commercial establishments and office spaces, proposed developments in Aptos Village will generate more employment opportunities particularly for local residents. It is also expected to maximize economic interaction and support among adjacent activities — living, working and shopping.

More than 70 percent of people living in Aptos are active

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Gulch Road. Historically, the area has been considered the "Aptos Village" with the turn of the century Bayview Hotel at the center.

Under the old plan, Valencia Street would extend across Trout Gulch and meet up with Aptos Creek Road. The Forest of Nisene Marks, a park now accessed from the Village, would be incorporated into the plan. The apple barn, which is now home to the Village Fair Antique, was to house a grocery store.

The new design also intends to turn the antique barn — built by Fred Hihn in 1890 — into a grocery store, but moves it by about 60 feet and has it rotated by 90 degrees.

Pirie admitted that it is a bit unusual for the architectural design of the Aptos Village to come before adoption by the Board of Supervisors of the actual plan, which is under revision by county planners and won't be ready until late fall.

"I have seen the updated design and it is not very different from what has been envisioned in the past although the new architectural blueprint seems more realistic and less dense," she pointed out.

While Pirie says that there may still be more changes made, she does not expect county supervisors to make extensive changes.

"They [developers] would have to apply permits and their application should comply with whatever's contained in the adopted plan," she said, acknowledging that the new architectural design is highly detailed and addresses traffic congestion concerns. "It minimizes regional vehicular traffic through the Village."

Village Promotes Healthy Lifestyles

Based on the development plan, commercial establishments in the Village will be geared toward catering to the needs of the people who live in the area.

"It will be a mixed-use neighborhood that creates a very healthy lifestyle," said Thompson.

He added that they also devised a way to draw more people into the nearby Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, which has 30 miles of trails perfect for hiking, mountain biking or a leisurely stroll. The park offers 10,000 acres of rugged semi-wilderness, rising from sea level to steep coastal mountains of more than 2,600 feet.

Horses are also allowed on a portion of the fire road and some trails.

Hibble welcomes the idea of making the entrance to the Forest of Nisene Marks more visible with better signing and parking, touting the state park as a part of the community that should have an entrance clearly visible to everyone. He

added that the Village would be a place for walking, citing such an activity's health benefits.

This new design for Aptos Village enables people to incorporate walking into activities they would be doing anyway, said Hibble.

Thompson, meanwhile, said the idea is to develop the area that would provide residents with low-key recreation opportunities, as well as bring Aptos people together in a setting that offers maximum social and cultural interaction.

Residents could come down from the Aptos Hills, areas off Trout Gulch and Valencia, and would have services for shopping right in the Village.



Aerial rendering of the new site plan for Aptos Village.

Concerns on Increased Water Use

The Aptos Village development plan didn't come without wrestling public worries, though.

Existing customers of the Soquel Creek Water District have expressed concerns that the proposed construction of 17 residential and commercial buildings in Aptos would further exacerbate the area's groundwater shortage.

In addition, the water agency has recently adopted a policy that requires applicants for new water service to offset 1.2 times the amount of water the new development is projected to use in order to achieve a "zero impact" on the District's water supply.

Beginning 2007, the water district requires the mandatory installation of high-efficiency toilets that include dual-flush toilets for all new developments and retrofits.

But Hibble said Aptos Village developers have already appropriately addressed these concerns by vowing to install high-efficiency fixture retrofits such as toilets, showerheads, faucet aerators, and zero-water urinals.

Pirie commended the developers' assurance that water usage will not increase as a result of the construction of new houses and commercial centers in the Village.

"They are very cooperative and are doing whatever they need to do to meet the water district's requirements," she added. ■