

Mall progress discouraging to developer

The slowness of negotiations between the owner of the Capitola Mall and the owner of land which the mall owner wants to purchase for expansion may be jeopardizing the interest of a fourth major department store, Emporium-Capwell, in locating at the site.

That's what Capitola Mall owner, John (Jay) DeBenedetti of Cypress Properties said in an interview last week.

"The whole project is totally bogged down," DeBenedetti said. "The ball is in our court — the Emporium said they are interested (in locating at the mall) and to give them more information.

"We haven't had a conversation with the Emporium for three months because we haven't been able to tell them anything new," he said. "There's been such a delay that I wonder if any expansion will occur."

Negotiations between DeBenedetti and the owner of the land behind the mall, the Browns of the Brown Bulb Ranch, are being handled through city manager Steve Burrell who is acting as an intermediary.

Burrell, however, said Thursday he does not think negotiations are "bogged down."

"We're still working on it,"

he said. "It's a very complicated procedure, and at any point, it's probably easy for people to feel it's bogged down, but we are getting there."

Burrell said many factors besides the price of the land have to be negotiated. The parties also have to agree on the size of the land to be bought, which piece or pieces are bought, and where the roads will be located.

Other studies, such as an updated environmental impact report, a traffic analysis, and further plans are in the process of being completed.

"It's a real big project," he said, "and when it goes forward, we want to be sure everybody gets what they want and the community benefits."

Burrell said it's not uncommon for negotiations on a project the size of the mall expansion to take a long time. Although the city has been working on the expansion for the past five years; expansion was first talked about in 1975.

Negotiations could be concluded in the next few months, he said. "It's going to be decided either way by then," he said.