

Developer shares elaborate plans for open spaces of Aptos Village

By BOB SMITH
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It's taken a decade for someone to put together a comprehensive development for the open spaces in Aptos Village.

And, developer Steve Mills says, it will be another year before anyone knows if the county and the community will accept his group's plans for village development.

The plans are part of a flurry of renewed governmental and private-sector interest in Aptos Village.

The Aptos Chamber of Commerce is considering the formation of a village improvement association and is planning a town hall meeting in March to discuss all of the options open to residents, property owners and the community-at-large.

The county is beginning its once-a-decade update of the Aptos General Plan and county supervisors have proposed creating a redevelopment agency for the village and a parking improvement district — both ways of financing public improvements without directly tapping the county treasury.

The State Department of Parks and Recreation may begin work this summer on a general plan for the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park — a precursor to any permanent improvements to the 10,000-acre "wilderness" park.

Mills, making a presentation last night on plans to develop 5½ acres of open land behind Aptos Station and the Bayview Hotel, outlined plans for a combination of residential, commercial and "live-work" units on land that was a railroad marshalling yard during the village's heyday as a lumbering town and then the site of a large apple-drying operation.

The foundations for the apple-drying sheds are still there but the buildings were torn down decades ago.

Mills told members of the Forest of Nisene Marks advisory committee that he and partners Rob Marani and Ted Crocker have options on the land behind Aptos Station and are also working with Granite Rock Co. — owners of the adjacent land behind the Bayview Hotel — to come up with a unified development plan for the area.

Their plan calls for a connector street running from the Aptos Creek Road entrance to Nisene Marks state park east to the intersection of Trout Gulch Road and Cathedral Drive.

The group's plan differs from the layout envisioned in the Aptos Village Plan developed in the early 1980s. That plan called for an extension of Granite Way west to Aptos Creek Road.

Mills said it will be another 30 to 45 days before he and his partners

are ready to file a formal application with the county Planning Department. The biggest delay is completion of the street plan lines for the village core. Mills is waiting for aerial survey photos needed to finish the plans, he said.

Plans call for 30 units of affordable housing to be built along the connector street near the post office. Fifteen units in the two-story "San Francisco-style townhouses" will be for seniors and the remainder will be two-bedroom family units.

Mills and Marani want to "move" some of the affordable-housing units they will otherwise have to build on their proposed "Rio Highlands" subdivision next to Deer Park Center to the Village area.

On the south side of the connector street behind Aptos Station, the developer wants to build 30,000 to 35,000 square feet of commercial and office space with a large parking lot in back of Aptos Station.

North of the connector street, Mills is proposing 20 "live-work" units.

A "live-work" unit has living accommodations upstairs and a studio or office downstairs.

Mills asked the Nisene Marks advisory committee last night to support his plans to build a park interpretive center and — possibly

— an Aptos museum in front of the Soquel Creek Water District water-treatment plant.

The building, envisioned by Mills as a 1,500-square-foot log-cabin-like building, could be used by the park system alone or shared with the Aptos Chamber of Commerce, which has expressed interest in a museum.

Mills said much of the funding for the \$200,000 to \$300,000 building would have to come from either the state or private groups.

Mills said he and his partners can't afford to build and give the building to the state park system.

The building would be built on the existing state right-of-way into the park.

Quinton Kay, chief ranger for the park system's Santa Cruz Mountains District, said nothing like an interpretive center can be constructed on the property until a general plan is completed for the state park.

He said department officials in Sacramento hope to start the general plan work — which could take 1½ to 3 years to complete — this summer if there is sufficient money in the department's budget.

The original portion of the park, given to the state by the Marks family, carries deed restrictions that forbid most types of development.

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