

WATSONVILLE

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Watsonville planners approve new motels

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Four developers are in the race to build motel units in Watsonville, but, according to a market consultant, there aren't enough potential customers to fill all of them.

Two of the four proposed projects were approved last night by the city Planning Commission; decisions on the two others were put off until later this month.

A unanimous nod of approval was given to Dennis Hazelton to build 78 units as part of the Watsonville Inn near Green Valley Road and Highway 1. A restaurant and conference room would fill out the project.

The second proposal, to build 100 units beside the Municipal Airport, was approved with only one dissenting vote — despite a staff recommendation to deny the project, called the Pajaro Valley Inn, because of noise and safety concerns.

The commission approved the projects after listening to Gary Dodril, a consultant with the San Francisco accounting firm Laventhol and Horwath, report that business in Watsonville, and traffic along Highway 1, was vigorous enough to fill another 100 motel rooms and supporting restaurants.

The accounting firm had been hired independently by two of the developers to get an idea of the demand for motel rooms. Data from the study is also used by bank officials to determine whether loans for the project promise a safe return.

Since evidence from the consultant shows that predicted growth could support only one major project, whoever builds first would appear to have an advantage.

The question was important enough to bring a full audience to the City Council chambers, where the meeting was held last night. City Manager John Radin and three council members, Mayor Ann Soldo, Gwen Carroll and Betty Murphy, who do not usually attend Planning Commission meetings, were also in attendance.

The Watsonville Inn, as described by Hazelton, would be an "upscale" motel with room rates averaging about \$52.75 nightly. The development would include a meeting room for 80 to 100 people and a 4,200-square-foot restaurant — a Lyon's, Hazelton hopes.

Speaking against the Watsonville Inn was Scott Johnson, of the Heritage Development Corp. Johnson's proposal to develop a 98-unit motel, restaurant and meeting room adjacent to the Landmark Industrial Park, was taken off last night's agenda and rescheduled to a special Planning Commission meeting on Jan. 13.

The fourth motel project, which would add 12 rooms to the Best Western Motel on

Freedom Boulevard, was also put on the agenda of that meeting.

Johnson objected to the project because of grading concerns and because environmental questions were addressed through a negative declaration rather than through a full-fledged environmental impact report (EIR), a costly, time-consuming process.

Staff explained the declaration was sufficient since the area had "been studied to death" through the Landmark EIR.

Johnson said his project, which would require rezoning a four-acre parcel, should be favored over other motel projects because, he said, his was better.

The Watsonville Inn will be considered Monday by the Design Review Committee.

Commissioners expressed some dismay over choosing between three major projects, knowing there was assured demand for just one.

"We've got to let the market decide," said Tony Campos, a real estate agent who sits on the commission. "We should give them the green light and stop holding them up."

Staff recommended denial of the 100-unit Pajaro Valley Inn, restaurant and conference center because of its location so near the runway of the airport, but commissioners approved it.

Larry Vosti, of Triad Associates, apparently assured commissioners that concerns about safety and noise would be dealt with. He expressed an eagerness to comply with any conditions regarding lights to avoid confusing his motel lights with the runway.

Vosti said he would include in his deed five conditions requested by the airport manager, including the right to fly at low altitudes and the right to cause noise, vibration, fumes, dust and fuel-particle emissions.

Vosti, the developer of Capitola Inn on Bay Avenue, said he is willing to give special consideration to the airport's needs because he believes many of his customers will be people flying into Watsonville for business meetings.

Vosti's project must now be approved by the Coastal Commission.

Eric Andersson, a new planning commissioner who voted for the first time last night, was the only dissenting vote on the airport motel.

Developers of both projects approved last night said they selected their sites because of their visibility from the freeway.

Developers are hoping to attract travelers along Highway 1 who would otherwise stay at the Holiday Inn in Sand City, or at one of Santa Cruz's 50-plus lodging facilities.

REFERENCE

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