

Capitola planners OK expanded mall

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CAPITOLA — Potential JC Penney and Leask's shoppers have one foot in the door as the long-proposed Capitola Mall expansion plan received a unanimous recommendation Thursday night.

That recommendation from the Capitola Planning Commission will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration Dec. 11. The council still must approve the plan.

John Gatto, a spokesman for mall developer Cypress Properties of Menlo Park, said after the meeting groundbreaking could begin as early as May, with some of the new stores opening the following spring.

The revised mall expansion plan calls for a 304,575-square-foot expansion. It features two new anchor stores — a 91,805-square-foot JC Penney and a 54,000-square-foot Leask's. It also includes sites for a future 7,000-square-foot Capitola branch library, which the city would build, and a bus-transfer center for

the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District.

Total square footage is about 20 percent less than the original 395,000-square-foot proposal by Cypress Properties. That original proposal, which would have nearly doubled the existing mall, was rejected by the City Council in August.

The revised plan — while not without problems — won over planning commissioners with the help of improvements to reduce both noise and traffic, as well as tentative agreement between the developer and the transit district as to the location of the bus-transfer center.

That bus-transfer center is proposed for the area of the existing center — in front of the mall between Sears and the main mall entrance.

The recommended plan should produce less noise than the original would have for neighbors in the Lotman Drive/Sommerfeld Avenue neighborhood behind the mall. It

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moves the proposed Clares Street Loop Road an additional 30 feet from the homes. The closest home will now be 70 feet from the road, and the height of the concrete sound wall will be determined by a future noise study.

Additionally, traffic — originally projected to increase 78 percent — will be reduced from that estimate by about 20 percent due to the reduced mall size. The loop road is expected to take some traffic off 41st Avenue, as well.

New signals are planned at the main 41st Avenue entrance, as well as where the loop road intersects Capitola Road at 38th Avenue. Commissioner John Elstad warned this new intersection could be dangerous, and commissioners agreed to study that area more.

The state will begin work on widening 41st Avenue where it crosses Highway 1 next year.

Residents behind the mall continued to express concern about the proximity of the proposed loop road and the noise it would generate.

Lotman Drive resident Lee Otter wanted a condition added requiring the landscaping along the sound wall to be planted at the outset of construction. A condition already exists requiring the sound wall to be installed before mall construction begins.

