

Aptos Academy to get new home

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ — Robert Fish broke into tears of joy Tuesday afternoon after the county Board of Supervisors gave him the go-ahead to build a new home for his private school, Aptos Academy.

"I'm delighted with the outcome," he said.

The vote was unanimous.

The site proposed for the K-12 school is a single-family lot at Bonita Drive and San Andreas Road. The \$2 million campus calls for a two-story classroom building, a soccer field, basketball court, play area, and parking lot.

People living near the school site had appealed to Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt for a special hearing. County zoning administrator Don Bussey had approved the project

last month, with a lengthy list of conditions, but neighbors argued the school, designed for up to 150 students, didn't belong in a rural residential area.

Neighbors could still appeal to the state Coastal Commission, but Fish said he hoped that wouldn't happen.

"I hope they're getting the message there's a lot of support for this," said Fish, who aims to break ground in the spring and open in January 1999.

During the hearing, neighbors spoke of their concerns about traffic, noise, water usage, and possible fire hazards. The two-story building, they said, didn't fit in with the neighborhood and would leave an eyesore should the private school fail.

Parents praised the Aptos Academy homeschool run by Fish's

daughter and said the school would benefit the community. Others spoke of Fish as a man of character and his success as the founder of a software company and as a management consultant.

Fish noted that schools are permitted in rural residential areas and said he would improve fire safety by installing a fire hydrant. He noted the school building would be 28 feet high, the same height as the home of one of the neighbors in opposition.

"It's really not outrageous," Fish said.

Supervisors Walt Symons and Ray Belgard spoke favorably of Fish and his project.

"I think people in the community will find him to be a very good neighbor," said Symons.

Belgard called the school's opponents "honorable," but added, "A

benefit for many may be a detriment to a few."

Supervisor Jan Beautz, who represents the Live Oak area, said it's impossible to locate all development in urban areas.

"Where I live, there's no open land," she said.

Wormhoudt, who had visited the neighborhood, dismissed the issues of traffic, safety and noise and called the school "attractively designed." She had concerns about the school's increasing pressure on water resources but found "the law doesn't prohibit what the Fishes are doing."

She proposed approving the school but asking the Planning Commission to review the water policy. Supervisor Jeff Almquist suggested that review be done by February, when a report is due on wells.