

Developers present plans for Aptos property

By LANE WALLACE

STAFF WRITER

RIO DEL MAR — A 51-home subdivision is in the works on a Rio Del Mar Boulevard site developers have been eyeing for more than 20 years.

The current proposal for the site, known as the Dennis property, was drawn up by Rio Highlands Investors, headed by Aptos developer Steve Mills and Watsonville strawberry-grower Don Driscoll.

Mills will discuss his plans today at a meeting of the Rio Del Mar Improvement Association. County Supervisor Walt Symons and county planners will be at the meeting, beginning at 9 a.m. at the main Aptos-La Selva fire station, 6934 Soquel Drive, Aptos.

Plans to build on the property, located on Rio Del Mar Boulevard across from Palmer Avenue, have been in the conceptual stages since the late Bob Marani bought the property from Dr. Robert Dennis in the mid-'70s. There had once been a horse stable on the site, which is still commonly called the Dennis property.

There was a Coastal Commission designation that the site should be "visitor serving," meaning a hotel or motel should be built, Mills said.

But neighbors were opposed to



Aptos developer Steve Mills, right, looks over plans for development of the Dennis property with Allen Collins, who lives near the project.

MICHAEL MCCOLLUM

such a development, and Marani didn't want to build something the locals didn't want, Mills said.

The designation was changed to residential, but Marani died

unexpectedly before he could move forward on any development. The property was sold to builder Richard Da Pont and Everett Meisner, who weren't

able to get a project going.

Mills and Driscoll bought the land in early 1989 and planned to put in utilities and roads, then sell

See PROJECT, back of section

the lots. But real-estate prices slipped, and the project never materialized. Part of the plan was to build the affordable-housing units required for the Dennis property in Aptos Village, but that became too complicated, Mills said.

Under the current plan, Mills said, Rio Highlands Investors would pay for 2.5 acres of the 6.7 acres at Searidge and McGregor drives in Seacliff on which the county Housing Authority plans to build affordable housing.

In exchange, the developers would be able to build all 51 homes at market rate. Mills said he expects prices to range from \$275,000 to \$325,000, similar to other homes in the area. The homes, on 8,000 square-foot lots, would be built in phases over two to three years.

Mills has been working with the Planning Department in hopes of getting a "negative declaration," certifying that environmental concerns have been worked out.

If the county's environmental coordinator rules against the negative declaration, Mills would have to prepare a full-blown environmental impact report. Preparation of the report and hearings would take a year, said Martin Jacobson of the Planning Department.

With a negative declaration, hearings could be held in three to four months, Jacobson said.

The main environmental issue center around the native grasses on the site. Mills is proposing to transplant the grass to the Arana Gulch greenbelt in Santa Cruz, planting three acres for every one taken from Rio Del Mar.

The California Environmental Quality Act requires mitigation measures when native grasses are displaced, Jacobson said.

