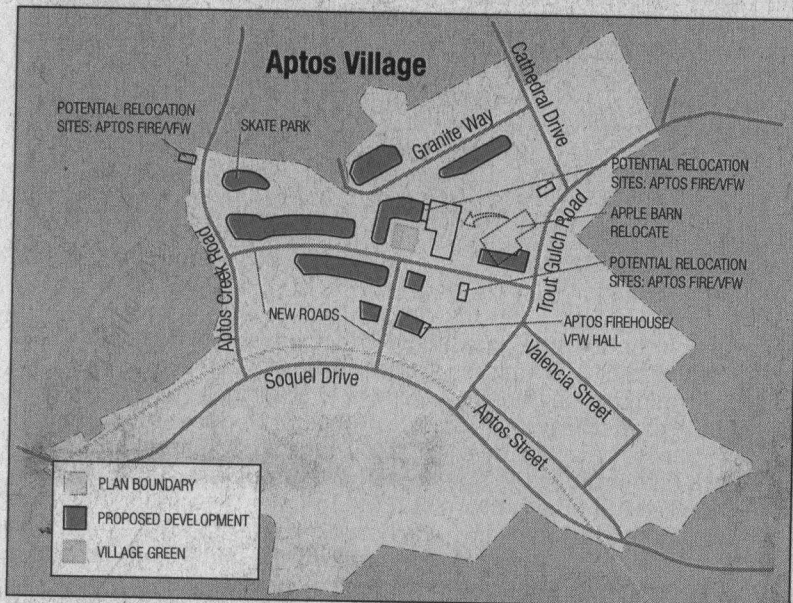


Village plan rolls forward

County Planning Commission gives unanimous OK to new general plan



ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL GRAPHIC

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SANTA CRUZ — One down, one to go.

County planning commissioners unanimously approved sweeping changes for Aptos Village on Wednesday, paving the way for a new village green, grocery store, apartments and small shops in the heart of the county.

"It was really gratifying to hear so many people say we got it right," said Supervisor Ellen Pirie, who took up the new plan soon after her election in 2000.

Pirie and the rest of the Board of Supervisors will consider final approval for the plan Feb. 23. The plan would

govern 15 acres and include a grassy village green, skate or bicycle park, extensive sidewalks, two new streets and 500 parking spaces. The historic Apple Barn, a former fruit-packing plant that now houses a collection of antique dealers, would be rotated and likely converted to a specialty grocery store.

More than 50 people packed the Board of Supervisors chamber on Wednesday morning, most speaking in favor of the proposed plan.

"There's really no social part to that village, and it has been crying out for some sort of accommodation for that for years," said architect Heidi

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Spicer of Aptos.

Aptos resident, historian and plan supporter John Hibble called the current village "this little tiny place where you go to die."

"I feel sorry for those businesses," Hibble said.

A number of opponents turned out as well, most of them neighbors who said they didn't want their peace and quiet intruded upon.

"If I wanted to live near lots of stores, I'd have a home on 41st Avenue," said Gail Adams of Aptos. "I value open space and natural beauty. I fear its loss in Aptos Village."

Before approving the proposed plan, though, commissioners pointed out that the existing plan calls for 2,500 to 3,000 residents versus

about 200 in the new plan. The current plan also calls for a major road through the middle of what is now an empty lot, instead of low-traffic streets that T at a village green.

"I think you really need to look and see what the current plan calls for," said Planning Commissioner Renee Shepherd. The new plan, she said, "is pretty innovative and exciting. I think it's a really great step forward."

The plan under consideration is for zoning and county general plan changes to allow the new development, not for the buildings themselves. Barry Swenson Builder architects will submit specific building plans at a later date.

Supporters hope the plan will revitalize what once was a village hub and home to logging mills, apple-packing plants and a train stop.