

New owners plan housing on big Rio del Mar parcel

By LANE WALLACE
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One of the few large undeveloped parcels in Rio del Mar is being purchased by a group of men who plan to submit an application to build homes there.

Steve Mills, a development consultant hired by the buyers, said his clients are buying the 16-acre parcel known as Rio Highlands, formerly called the Dennis property. It's next to Deer Park Center, along Rio del Mar Boulevard.

The prospect of development has raised the interest of neighborhood groups, who are con-

cerned about densities and the prospect of a four- to six-acre park in the middle of the project.

Mills and some of the developers have already met with members of the Aptos Beach Pines Property Owners Association and Rio del Mar Improvement Association; more meetings are planned. A meeting is also planned with Aptos Neighbors, a group that has members throughout Aptos.

Mills said he got the impression from the people he met with that "they're not crazy about the idea of a park" on Rio Highlands.

But, said Mills, it's "pretty likely" some kind of park will be included as a condition of development, because that's part of the Local Coastal Plan requirements adopted by the county in the early '80s.

Mills said the developers — Charles Perry Jr., Ron Jones, Sal Maleti, Marty Hall and Charles Kessinger — are prepared to put in a park if that's what's required.

All five live in Santa Cruz County, except Hall, who spotted the property while driving to visit with his mother in Rio del Mar.

The five men are buying the land from Everett Meisser and Da Pont Construction, who had planned to develop the property themselves before deciding to sell.

Mills said the meetings are being held with the Aptos Beach Pines and Rio del Mar groups because "we don't want to end up in a Catch-22" where the county staff would support a park, and residents would oppose the project because of the park's inclusion. Mills expects an application to the county within 45 days.

"We want to talk with them (the residents) and get some kind of consensus," before making a final application, Mills said.

Of the 16 acres, four acres are on a steep slope and undevelopable.

The zoning would allow up to 106 units on the remaining land, but Mills said the developers anticipate a lower number; the exact figure hasn't been worked out yet.

The Aptos Beach Pines and Rio del Mar groups aren't against development of Rio Highlands, but want to see that what's put in is in keeping with the surrounding area, said Allen Collins, an Aptos Beach Pines resident who attended the developers' meetings with both associations. Those who attended the meetings, Collins said, feel the park and any kind of high density could clash with the area, which is composed of single-family homes.

A park designed for children wouldn't be of much benefit for Aptos Beach Pines area, because only six of 88 homes have children, Collins said.

Collins acknowledged the county's requirement for a park, but said he hopes there is "some mechanism" that would allow the requirement to be waived.