

SV auto plaza gets environmental OK

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Now that the Felton wildflower issue is resolved, car dealer Steve Bergstrom can move ahead with plans to build an auto plaza on 16 acres along Scotts Valley Drive.

This past month, the project has been on hold, after a botanist reported the endangered Felton wildflower might grow on the 16-acre former quarry property that is proposed for a 140,000 square-foot auto center and office complex.

The botanist's report was part of the \$10,000 environmental impact report billed to Bergstrom.

Even though no Felton wildflower had been seen at the old quarry, city officials and Bergstrom were told by State Fish and Game Department officials that plans would have to be delayed until next summer when the flower might pop up.

And, if the flower had shown its blossomy head, everything would have been on hold until the flower could be relocated in its dormant state next fall and winter.

"That could take 18 months," City Administrator August Caires said Monday.

Tuesday, Caires reported, "We have a go-ahead."

He said that a Fish and Game botanist walked the old quarry site and found no evidence of the wildflower, clearing the Environmental Impact Report for a final review by the Scotts Valley Planning Commission in about one month. At that time, the commission can also approve Bergstrom's plans.

Caires and other officials, including most members of the council look forward to tax revenues — up to \$600,000 a year — that Bergstrom's complex will bring to the city.

While most councilmen openly welcome the auto plaza on what has been an eyesore in the city, Councilman Joe Miller speaks of growing unease.

"The thing that's of greatest concern to me is that when he (Bergstrom) started here, he was talking about \$600,000 a year in sales tax, and now he's talking about \$300,000 and adding an 85,000-square-foot office space he can lease," Miller said Wednesday.

"We would love to lay out the red carpet but there has to be a meeting

of minds, and I think it would be wrong to think just because his plans were very positive for the city at one time, they would remain positive.

"As he (Bergstrom) puts together a plan that's less and less desirable — costing more and bringing in less revenue — we might look at it less favorably."

Bergstrom plans to move 188,000 cubic yards of soil — 9,894 truckloads, Caires said — to cut back the face of the scarred hill and level its top. Also, he'll have excavated another 71,000 cubic yards to get the contours he wants.

The 140,000 square feet of buildings will comprise 55,000 square feet in the auto plaza and 85,000 square feet in an office building. The structures will be from 1-3 stories.

A total 704 parking spaces will be paved, 344 in the lower portion and 360 in the upper area.

The upper parking area had been designated for vehicle storage, but some parking is being considered for employees.

Miller doesn't like that change, saying the upper parking is more inaccessible.

The complex, which would include three to five car dealerships, is expected to add 100 more jobs to the city's economy.

The EIR notes the abandoned quarry "is an unattractive backdrop to activities along Scotts Valley Drive and detracts from vistas from points along the drive and Highway 17 as well as other distant locations."

City Planning Director Bob Hanna says he's pushing for landscaping and contouring that will beautify the escarpment.

Bergstrom acquired the 16 acres from Lester and Mildred Holmes for \$1.1 million after the sales was cleared by a Chapter 11 bankruptcy court on May 14, 1985, according to county records.

Caires said it's expected Bergstrom will proceed with getting his plans approved as quickly as he can.