

# Auto dealer complex OKed by planners

By BOB SMITH

Plans to move four Santa Cruz area auto dealerships to Capitola — the largest Mid-county commercial construction project since the opening of the Capitola Mall nearly a decade ago — moved one step closer to fruition Thursday night.

The Capitola Planning Commission approved an environmental impact report, drainage plans, site plans, use permits and variances for the project, which will be located alongside the freeway between 41st Avenue and Wharf Road.

Four Santa Cruz dealers — Marina Pontiac-Cadillac-Buick, Roy Baldwin Oldsmobile-GMC-AMC-Jeep and Renault, Santa Cruz British Motors-Subaru, and Porsche-Audi of Santa Cruz — plan to move to the 9.6 acre site this fall.

Together, the dealers will occupy 198,398 square feet of land, although the actual building area will be considerably smaller.

Gary Reece of Dapont Construction said he plans to start grading on the brush-covered site 10 days after the Capitola City Council approves the \$6-8 million project.

The City Council will hold a public hearing on the project Thursday evening and is expected to approve the major elements of the project.

The proposal has been strongly supported by the city's government, with the processing of rezoning and general plan changes given top priority in City Hall.

The project is the first major project to come to the city

since the formation of the Capitola Redevelopment Agency.

The Redevelopment Agency was originally formed to finance the city's share of a new 41st Avenue overpass, construct median strips on 41st Avenue and other improvements in the 41st Avenue that the city believes are necessary to further expand the Capitola Mall.



A bird's eye view of a scale model of the proposed Capitola Auto Plaza. The freeway is at the bottom of the photo, Wharf Road at the left, and 41st Avenue on

the right. Dealerships (l-r) are: Roy Baldwin Motors, Porsche-Audi of Santa Cruz, British Motors-Subaru, and Marina Pontiac-Cadillac-Buick.

The state has agreed to pay for all of the 41st Avenue overpass widening — a project expected to start later this year. But the city is going ahead with other area improvement projects.

The projects will be paid for by "tax increment" financing. Tax increment financing allows a redevelopment agency to collect all of the property taxes generated by an increase in the area's assessed value. That money can be used to either pay off revenue bonds issued by the Redevelopment Agency or directly finance improvements.

A major issue in the proposal is a staff proposal that the auto dealers pay 50 cents a square foot towards 41st Avenue redevelopment that would pay for median strips and other improvements.

Reece told the commissioners Thursday night that the figure was unacceptable to the dealers. Commissioners told him to go to the City Council with their objections.

Mayor Michael Routh, in the Planning Commission audience as were City Council members Stephanie Harlan, Jerry Clarke and Bob Bucher, said afterwards that the city might be

willing to negotiate on the fees — or forgive them in exchange for other conditions being accepted by the dealers.

The auto center proposal has attracted almost no comment in the several hearings before the Capitola City Council and the City Planning Commission.

Last night's hearing before the planning commission was no exception.

The major criticism of the project, as proposed, came from Planning Commissioner Bill Fisher who challenged Reece, environmental consultant John Gammon and engineer Fred Werdmuller of Bowman and Williams about plans to dump all of the storm water and other water, such as from car washing and the service bays into Soquel Creek.

Werdmuller has designed a "double containment" grease trap system that is supposed to collect most of the oil and grease from the auto dealerships and keep it from flowing into Soquel Creek during the summer.

The 9.6-acre site lies astride the dividing line between the drainage areas for Soquel Creek and the 41st Avenue storm drain system which ultimately empties through Moran Lake and Monterey Bay.

Reece and Werdmuller are suggesting draining the entire

project into Soquel Creek because officials at the County's Zone V flood control district won't allow all of the site to be drained into the overloaded 41st Avenue system.

Fisher challenged that system as not being adequate.

That system won't trap lighter materials and chemicals dissolved in the water, such as soaps and detergents that might be used to wash cars. "The creek is not a creek in the summer," Fisher told Reece and the other commissioners. "It's a swimming pool and it seems inconsistent to be pouring this material into a public swimming pool."

Environmental consultant John Gammon said an assumption was made in the environmental review process that the bulk of the contaminants finding their way into the storm drain would be grease and oils from the parking lots, detergents from the car washing and some wax.

The State Department of Fish and Game, Gammon said, is

satisfied with the double containment grease trap system.

Fisher wasn't but didn't vote against the system because he was called away from the commission meeting by a family emergency in the middle of the discussion.

Commission chairman Rick Karleen suggested imposing limits on the types of solvents and chemicals that the auto dealers could use in the future.

"If the system can't be designed to filter it out, then let's change the operation to eliminate them," he suggested. The city is requiring quarterly pumpings of the grease traps and an analysis of the residue found in the system.

The dealers lost their bids for two major concessions.

The city now has a 41st Avenue sign ordinance limiting new signs to a maximum height of 16 feet. The dealers asked for a waiver that would allow them to erect a 40-foot-high clock tower pylon at the entrance to the dealerships on Gross Road and 41st Avenue.

The Commission rejected the proposal, saying they did not like the design submitted by a local sign company. But they did keep the door open to a future variance, telling Reece and the dealers that they would consider a variance to the height limit if a suitable design was submitted.

The commission was unyielding, however, on a request for a 10-foot-high door at the rear of the Roy Baldwin Motors service building. Reece had argued that the automatic door was necessary for the economical operation of the service shop. The environmental impact report said that sound levels emanating from the repair shop should be no more than 60 decibels because of a nearby mobile home park.