

Scotts Valley leaders say project headed in right direction

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SCOTTS VALLEY — After multiple iterations and a revolving door of developers, the long-talked about Town Center for Scotts Valley is the furthest along it's ever been since initiated almost a decade ago.

Yet, it's still far from reality.

The city entered into an exclusive negotiating contract with Property Development Centers, the Pleasanton-based development arm of Safeway, in December 2012.

Scotts Valley leaders say they hope the deep-pocketed developer can nail down purchase deals in the coming months with the various property owners whose vacant land is eyed for the center.

There are about nine separate parcels that need to be brought together to make the 15-acre development work, most involving several different owners.

The city of Santa Cruz is the largest property owner, owning the land that formerly housed the Scotts Valley airport.

Each parcel sale requires a separate contract, which involves extensive negotiations, according to Councilman Dene Bustichi.

"Though it's taken some time, we're further along than we've been with any past developer we've worked with ... by a mile," Bustichi said. "No developer has gotten into contract with any of these property owners."

The proposed Town Center has been the dream of Scotts Valley leaders during the past 10 years as a way to give the small town a heart.

City officials also desire a large, upscale commercial center for the higher sales tax revenue it likely would generate.

"When you don't have a downtown, that sort of leaves a hole in your city,"



Scotts Valley is moving forward with plans for a town center between the library and the skate park.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Councilman Randy Johnson said. "That hole is something we've wanted to fill for a long time."

The idea is to create a mixed-use development with restaurants, shops, offices and residential units — a walkable place that includes civic uses and a town green.

The center would be constructed on empty land between the busy Mount Hermon Drive and Blue Bonnet Lane to the north. City officials promise not to take anything away from nearby Skypark.

The city's vision calls for an area with 150,000 square feet of retail space, which will be rented by small and national retailers alike. Of that, Safeway would likely take up about 50,000 square feet.

To say the project has been stalled or delayed is an understatement.

The City Council approved a Town Center specific plan in December 2008, which lays out the framework for developers to follow.

Five different developers have come on board with the project over the years but bailed out for various reasons, mostly related to the expense and difficulty of securing the properties.

"There's big dollars to be spent here up front and it could be years until you see a return on your investment," Johnson said. "This developer is looking at it in terms of decades, not years."

Like any major proposed development, residents have mixed views of the Town Center.

"It would be great to have everything so central here and you could just walk to it and not have to go to Santa Cruz," Terrill Morgan said. "Anything to stay away from (Highway) 17. I do love Scotts Valley."

Critics fear the Town Center could turn into another bland strip mall, which city leaders vow won't happen.

"We call it 'Shops Valley' and it's already big enough," Sherri Hutchinson said. "We have enough culture here. We don't want it to be a big city."