

SUTTER HILL

# Planning Commission reviews Capitola EIR

By Larry Mauter

A decision on the adequacy of the environmental impact report (EIR) on a proposed Capitola general plan amendment is now before the city's planning commission.

This week, commissioners heard public testimony on the subject and offered their own comments about the EIR.

Affected by the proposed plan change would be 16 acres adjacent to the Sutter Hill regional shopping center on 41st Avenue.

Although zoned as commercial property when annexed by the city in 1975, the property's general plan designation is for medium and high density housing.

Planning consultant Bob Graham, of Charles Delk and Associates, reviewed for commissioners seven significant environmental impacts that would result if the amendment is implemented.

## SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

The EIR impacts listed include significant cumulative traffic impact on 41st Avenue; increased air pollution; potential deterioration of downtown Santa Cruz and Watsonville; potential excess of commercial landuses within Capitola; reduction of high density residential housing; potential noise increases and possible pressure to create higher density land uses in surrounding areas.

## COOPERATION

Graham stated that mitigation measures proposed in the EIR are "general" and said three of the seven mitigation steps "would require coordination with the city, county and other cities within the county."

"It appears imperative that the effort be stepped up" for increased reliance on multi-modal (bus) transportation, commented Graham.

Reading from a letter by environmental consultant Katie Burdick, Stephanie Harlan suggested that impact mitigation measures should be more specific. She claimed that recent guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) would require specific, rather than general mitigation measures.

Harlan urged the public hearing be held open to allow additional comments.

## CREATING SLUM?

Depot Hill resident Laura Sarratt told commissioners "we may be creating a slum for our grandchildren" if the commercial expansion is allowed. She said the suggestion about increased bus travel was a "very humorous remark." "Nobody will ride the busses as long as we can drive cars," Sarratt explained.

A bicycle rider in the audience noted that even current conditions for bike riders on 41st Avenue are "not very inviting."

Responses to the EIR from planning commission members took a different tack from the public's comments.

high density.

Howard Dysle, commission chairman, commented the increased percentage of commercial area for the city "doesn't bother me that much." He explained that if the county owned the west side of 41st Avenue, Capitola's commercial percentage would be reduced, even though the commercial activity would still be there.

Dysle also noted the trend toward smaller cars, and asked if reduced emissions from future cars were considered in the EIR.

## HEARING CONTINUED

Commissioners voted 4-0 (Deasy absent) to continue the hearing on the EIR until June 6 to allow additional comments. In a related matter, commissioners passed a resolution calling for a public hearing on the general plan amendment for their June 6 meeting.

## OTHER BUSINESS

On other agenda items, the commission:

--Denied without prejudice an application for a use permit to exceed the height limitation in the central village area. Applicant Richard Cook had proposed an eight apartment-one office structure for the northeast corner of Capitola and California Avenues. Public testimony on Cook's proposal was generally negative. Concern over increased Village crowding, auto parking and the proposed architecture was raised during the meeting.

--Continued a use permit and architectural and site review for four houses planned for 909 and 911 Capitola Ave. Bert Stearns is the applicant.

--Continued application by Bob Grimes for a use permit to sell beer and wine at 115 Stockton Ave. Commissioners were concerned how the alcohol would be served and voted 4-0 to continue the item to hear from the applicant.

--Continued indefinitely John Wakefield's application for architectural and site review for a sign at 420 Kennedy Dr.

Commissioner Al Wilder noted that no good impacts of the project are brought up into the EIR summary. He argued that "convenient shopping is a social good" and should be considered.

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Wilder asked how CEQA weighs the economic benefits of projects. He pointed out that the city could spend revenue money from the project for park purchases within the city. I don't see these things are touched. They should be listed," Wilder commented.

Commissioner Jack Nicol commented the losses of potential high density housing could be replaced, by designating other sites in the area for

REF

7695