

WATSONVILLE
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Airport motel gets tentative OK from City Council

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The owners of the Capitola Inn, who have been trying for eight years to build a 100-unit motel near the Watsonville airport — some say too near — may have finally landed approval for the project.

The Watsonville City Council unanimously approved an environmental impact report for the project last night, and directed staff to work with the developer on some of the problems mentioned in the report.

Initially, the project owners, Triad Associates, had proposed a motel and a 3,600-square-foot conference center for the 4.2-acre site at 821 Airport Blvd. The project includes a 150-seat restaurant and stores.

The council will decide whether to grant a special permit — nearly the last approval needed from the city — at its Feb. 12 meeting.

If the permit is granted, it will be against the advice of Planning Director Maureen Owens and Airport Director Kim Wirht, both of

whom worry about the proximity of the proposed Pajaro Valley Inn to the airport. Their worries are backed up by findings in the environmental impact report.

The report said that even though the project is not in the most restricted area or "clear

findings.

He said he spent six hours one day watching how closely planes came to the parcel, and that pilots did not make their turns until they were "way past the site."

He pointed out that "a very large" office building has been

One man, speaking against the project, told the council he thought certain members, who he said want to see the airport closed down, would approve the project just to create more conflicts with the airport.

"Doesn't anyone want to say

city would prefer the project to have would have the potential to service much more than the motel needs, making further development easier.

But the consultant who prepared the EIR agreed with council members that downsizing the

access, he said.

"It would serve the airport," he said, "It would be a tremendous access for the Fly-In."

Vosti asked the council to consider the jobs the motel would bring to the area and the transient occupancy tax it would generate. Vosti said rooms would probably range from \$50 to \$65 a night for double occupancy and he expected the motel would gross between \$1.1 million and \$1.2 million a year, bringing the city about \$100,000 in the tax. Last year, the total TOT tax from all the hotels and motels in the city was \$150,000.

He told the council he was extremely frustrated with the "bureaucratic jungle" he's had to bushwhack to get the project approved. The project has been through three extensions of the special use permit, two environmental impact reports and permission from the city and Caltrans to extend the water and sewer lines. If the council approves the coastal development permit/special use permit, it will still have to approve a second permit for the utilities extension.

'Doesn't anyone want to say that if we don't approve it we're anti-business?'

— Mayor Todd McFarren

zone" around the airport, it is within an approach/departure pattern zone, making it a "high risk" area.

Planes taking off and landing at the Watsonville Airport fly between 300 and 500 feet over the site. The report says the planes are "at a high angle and high power climb, with the greatest potential for engine failures," and that there is no way to reduce this risk to an "insignificant" level.

One of the project owners, Larry Vosti, disagreed with the report's

built near the site, and if anything the risk should be higher there because the offices are used mostly during the day, when pilots use the airport the most. The motel would be used mostly at night, when airport traffic is significantly less, he said.

Council members said one of the alternatives proposed in the report, extending the runway to make sure pilots were well beyond the proposed motel when they made their turns, was a viable option.

that if we don't approve it we're anti-business?" asked Mayor Todd McFarren after no one else stepped forward to comment on the project.

The environmental impact report also said the project would have the negative impact of encouraging growth in the surrounding area, which is almost completely undeveloped. This could happen, the report said, because water and sewer lines will have to be extended to the parcel, as none currently exist. The pipe size the

pipes would be less growth-inducing.

Because the parcel is in the Coastal Zone, the developer was required to consider putting his project on several other sites in the city.

Vosti said he considered none of them feasible.

"This is the best motel site there is in Watsonville," he said.

The motel would be visible from Highway 1, be near both the airport and downtown and have good

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