

CABRILLO TIMES AND GREEN  
SHEET 1/29/76

# Something new's been added to Aptos post office project

By BILL AKERS

The news that the county wants to exert planning control over a new post office to be built in Aptos Village came as stunning news to members of the Aptos Village design review committee last week. Angered members feared the action by the county to seek jurisdiction will delay the project by months and perhaps even cause the US Postal Service to change its mind about building it.

"You've got to be kidding," an amazed Mrs. Lucile Aldrich blurted out at hearing the news.

As a more-or-less federal agency, the Postal Service under law does not have to get caught up in the county planning maze, but the county wants it to undergo the process as if it were any other project. It could take as much as three or four months if the post office decides to go along with it.

And if the Postal Service decides not to, it was stated in a letter from the planning department that it might not get the county's permission to connect the new building to the sewer and storm drain lines.

If the planners can make good on that threat, it could mean they will require other public agencies wanting to build within the county to undergo the same review process.

The whole thing came as a complete surprise to committee members who have been working on a design study for Aptos village as part of the general plan. At their December meeting members saw — and applauded — the conceptual design for the new post office which will be built at Cathedral Drive and Trout Gulch Road during the coming year. None of the county planning staff at that meeting revealed said anything about making the postal service get planning approval from the county.

The news came almost as an afterthought at the end of last night's meeting. Susan Blair, the planning department's staff member working with the committee, revealed the contents of a letter which had been written by her to Richard Huyck, the architect for the project.

Mrs. Blair told Huyck that the property on which the post office will be built is zoned all wrong. It is zoned R-1-6 (single-family residential with 6,000 square-foot minimum

site), "a zone district in which neither a post office nor warehouse facility is a permitted or conditional use."

An application should be made to change the zone to UBS-1-acre, Mrs. Blair wrote, a process which could take three or four months since it must go before the planning commission and board of supervisors "who will assess the proposed location and character of use within the Aptos community."

And further, she told Huyck, the Postal Service should apply for a planned development review which "allows a thorough review of all site planning, building features, street improvements, signing, drainage and on-off-site circulation."

Without this, she said, "the planning department cannot authorize the issuance of a building permit, grading permit, sewer connection, driveway encroachment, or the use of county drainage facilities . . ."

Mrs. Blair said that senior planner Henry Baker wrote the Postal Service in July asking it to submit these applications, but that no reply had been made.

In her letter she outlined the problems of traffic circulation street improvements, grading, draining and design which the post office presented.

"The building and site design will have a crucial visual relationship to the village from all angles and as such, we will want to carefully review all of the above listed design treatments."

Committee members thought the county had been doing that all along on an informal basis since the Postal Service had consulted with just about everyone during the months the project has been in the works.

They were also bitter over the fact the planning department didn't let the committee know of its plans to try to take over planning control on the project.

One of its members, Aptos postmaster Johann Tarr, was totally unaware of the county's intent.

"This is a surprise to us," Tarr said today. He said the Postal Service "has bent over backward . . . to let everyone know what we had on our mind . . ."

He said the department is "interested in up-grading the village . . . we're not going

to build anything we'll be ashamed of." The post office, he said, "doesn't come in riding rough-shod over everybody."

If the Postal Service decides to give in to the county's demand, "it could cause a delay . . . it could cause the whole thing to start over. I don't know . . .", he said.

Huyck said he has sent the letter on to the Postal Service. "I'm sure something can be worked out," he said.

Mrs. Blair said today the county could deny the post office the right to connect to the sewers and draining system if it did not comply with the request. She cited the case of a brand new, \$1 million post office building in Maryland being boarded up because it could not hook up to sewers under a similar situation.

But, she said, the county "is not at all interested in going to that length," and said she "anticipates full cooperation" from the Postal Service.

But if there are "any problems," she said, "we could deny (the application for) the sewer permit."

She said the matter was not broached at the December meeting of the committee when the post office plans were first presented since it was not a matter of concern at that time. But more recently, "when they did not return any answer (to the county's earlier letter), then we began to worry."

Donald Trost, Postal Service official who has been working on the project, was not available for comment. The service's public information officer, James Speck, in San Bruno, said he heard about the development "2½ minutes ago." He said he was waiting to be briefed by the project manager and would have a statement later.

Committee member Dwight Sharpe reflected the general reaction to the letter. "This committee's members are mad as hell," he said. "We're supposed to be the committee working on this — appointed by the supervisors — but it seems to me we're being kept in the dark."

Sharpe said the committee had never been told about Baker's letter, and declared, "It seems to me we should have been in on this from the beginning . . ."

Mrs. Blair said she expected to hear from the Postal Service within a week.