

would assist in the relocation of any business affected by the development.

■ Business owners were further concerned that the RDA was attempting to use local taxpayers' money to subsidize the sale of land for a chain retail center coming from outside the area. Burns admitted that some people view this as a subsidy income for a developer or an out-of-town business, but he clarified that the RDA's role is to create a site for business development, and not to subsidize the sale of land.

In their report submitted to the Board regarding the retail center, RDA staff wrote: "While some Agency financial assistance will likely be required, it is proposed that any assistance should be restricted to covering extraordinary site assembly costs (building acquisition, site clearance and demolition, and business relocation assistance), and not to underwrite the raw land costs below market levels."

### **Critics Speak Out**

Not everyone is as excited about the shopping complex as the RDA director and managers of Redtree Properties, and no one actually spoke in favor of the project during the public meeting.

Although he eventually approved further study, supervisor Walt Symons suggested that if the project was set up to entice outside businesses with subsidies, that it was unlikely he could support it.

Richard Sacks, the owner of a local computer service, voiced his agreement after Board chairman Gary Patton opened the discussion for public comment.

"It's wrong to use public monies to subsidize business from outside this community when you haven't even tried to develop local businesses," Sacks said.

Sacks accused county officials of looking outside the area all too often when the services they seek are usually available locally. He said he believes the large "box stores" would come to this area even without the help of county government, so he preferred to see county resources used to help local business owners.

Bob Thomas, owner of Outdoor World and a co-founder of Grass Roots Organization United for Progress, is also

against the development. Thomas said it's bad enough local business owners are up against a sagging economy without government officials squeezing them more.

"Because of the eagerness of city and county politicians to acquire retail sales tax dollars, the small businessman is being slowly locked out of the market so that large box stores can come in," Thomas said.

Thomas wants to see more study done on what the leakage of retail dollars is to the San Jose area before this project moves forward. He believes a convention center would be a more beneficial project for the area than additional retail space.

Others property and business owners who spoke at the meeting said a forced relocation would bring considerable hardship, in some cases devastating a life's-worth of work.

Virginia Harvey owns a parcel within the proposed development site. She maintains 13 rentals and employs 45 people there, she said. She said she has owned the property for 26 years and worked with her husband during that time to develop it.

"I think it's wrong to use the funds to squash me out," Harvey said.

Harvey wasn't alone when she said this proposal could spell the end of her business.

Drs. Philip Ottinger and Carl Primavera, who own a dental practice within the proposed site, claim it would be extremely hard to reproduce the type of environment they have achieved at their Soquel Drive location. Ottinger told the Board members that he and his partner have "programmed" the building specifically for dentistry. Part of their practice includes intravenous anesthesia, which means they must be next to the hospital. Ottinger described any forced business relocation as "unwarranted."

Burns responded that the Agency is obligated under state and federal law to provide relocation assistance to every business affected by the project. That obligation includes identifying a new and comparable site for the displaced owners to conduct their businesses, and in some cases, reimbursement for documented "good will" losses.

At least one business owner said he felt slighted by this shopping center proposal because he recently approached the Board for