

Watsonville wants builder to widen roads, bridges

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WATSONVILLE — J. Lohr Properties will need to widen both Harkins Slough Road and Landmark Parkway to four lanes before the city will allow 940 housing units to be built.

That's what the City Council unanimously decided Tuesday night after receiving a consultant's traffic analysis that estimated the development would result in 15,000 additional vehicle trips a day in the area.

Council members went beyond the recommendation of traffic consultants Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., of San Jose, requiring the developer to mitigate traffic impacts by improving the roads to four lanes — two in each direction.

Traffic consultant Mike Waller had recommended the developer widen the two roads to only two lanes, and donate additional rights-of-way on both streets for future widening. Waller said four-lane

roads would eventually be needed, but — “to be fair to the developer” — that development doesn't by itself require four-lane roads.

The council went along with Public Works Director John Cooper's recommendation that J. Lohr Properties be responsible to widen the two roads to four lanes.

Cooper conceded that two lanes would be a “reasonable recommendation under normal circumstances.” But, due to the city's financial state, he told councilmembers, “There appears to be no way that there will be the resources available in the city to widen the subject streets or the bridges at a future date.”

In addition to the road widening, council members also asked that the developer widen three bridges — Struve Slough and both Watsonville Slough bridges — to 44 feet, which would allow for four lanes of traffic. Such a width would be below minimum standards, Cooper said, but would save the developer

a considerable amount of money and still allow four lanes.

The 940 units are being proposed on what is being called Landmark Estates, a 150-acre parcel in the Harkins Slough area.

The widening of Harkins Slough Road would provide a much-needed alternative route from Highway 1 to the downtown business district, said Waller. It would relieve congestion on Main Street without widening it.

Widening Landmark Parkway would connect one of the large residential areas with some of the largest employers in the city, Waller added.

In a related matter, the council finalized a General Plan amendment and rezoning for 18 acres of the parcel, which will allow 136 low-income apartments to be built as part of the project. The 136 low-income apartments would represent 15 percent of the project, which is scheduled to be built in phases over six to seven years.

Teen admits taking money