

Residents, county officials worry about expansion of Capitola Mall

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CAPITOLA — Increased traffic and noise are the main obstacles to a long-proposed expansion of Capitola Mall, which will nearly double in size with the addition of two major department stores.

What that second department store will be, however, continues to be up in the air. And, neighbors behind the mall are objecting to the proximity of the proposed second store.

County officials, meanwhile, have made their objections clear regarding the "cumulative" impacts of increased traffic from mall expansion to surrounding areas.

The expansion was subject of a special Planning Commission meeting Tuesday night at Capitola City Hall. No action was taken.

John Gatto, spokesman for Cypress Properties in Menlo Park — owners of the mall — told The Sentinel after the meeting that JC Penney already is signed up for one of the two new stores. Talks are continuing with "two or three other different stores," he added, including Emporium-Capwell. Macys, however, "has definitely said no," Gatto said.

Capitola attempted to entice Macys to the mall in 1984 by doing a market study showing what kind of volume the area could support. Macys turned its back on the study, saying it needed a permanent population base of 400,000 to put a store in an area — a population nearly double Santa Cruz County's.

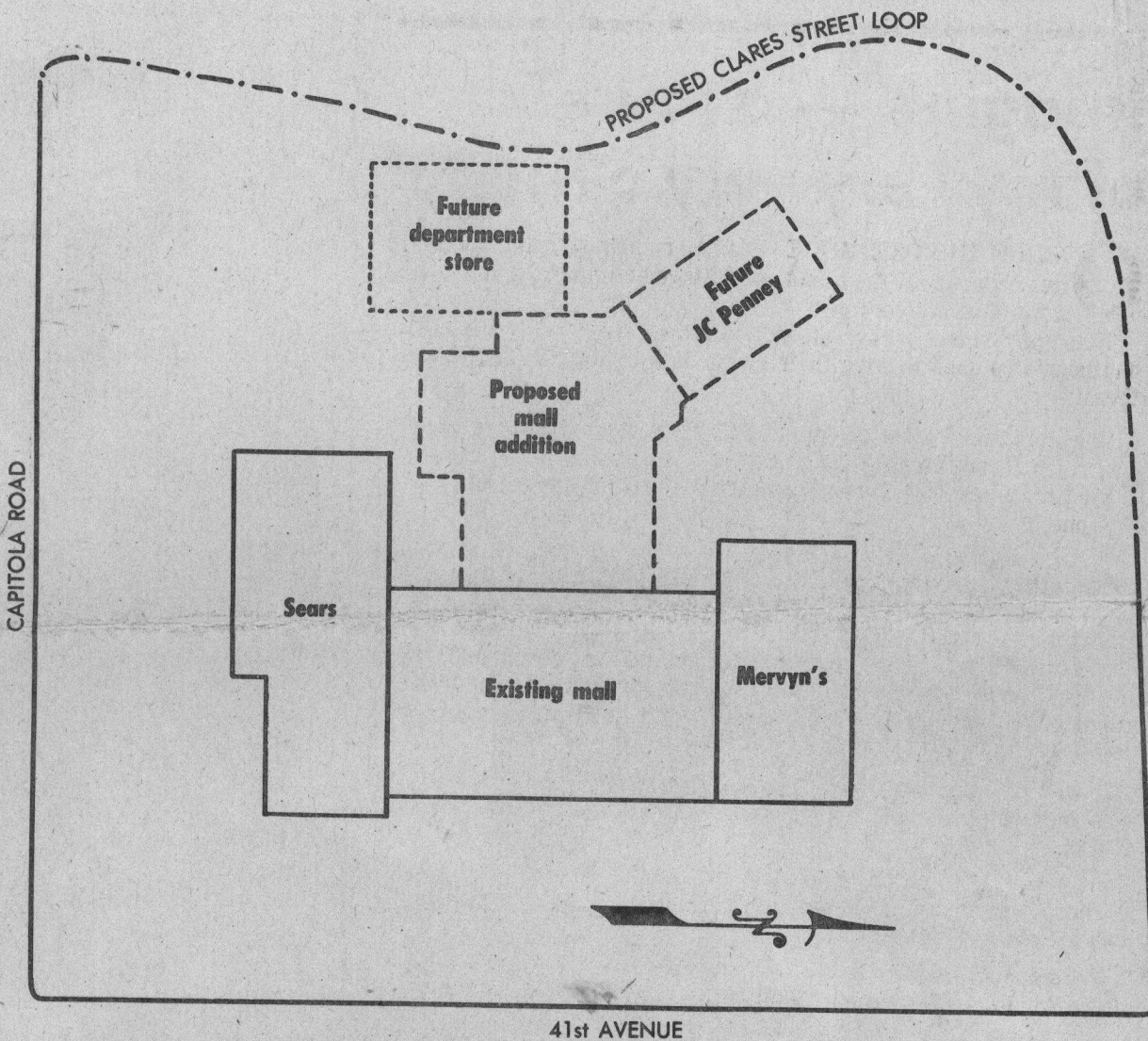
The expansion plan shows a 91,805-square-foot Penney, with a second department store — whatever it may be — of 120,000 square feet. Numerous smaller shops will round out the expansion.

The two-phase plan calls for the addition of 378,501 square feet to the existing 381,098-square-foot mall. The completed mall — at 759,599 square feet — would be roughly the size of Oakridge Mall in south San Jose.

The Planning Commission's 2½-hour public hearing covered the expansion plan and draft environmental impact report. The issue will be taken up again by commissioners July 17, when the final environmental impact report is scheduled to be discussed.

Capitola Planning Director Susan Tupper said most of the concerns including traffic and noise will be covered in the final EIR. The speakers Thursday, however, weren't waiting for the final report.

Those speakers included county



Sketch of proposed additions to Capitola Mall

officials, a transit district spokesman and numerous residents from the Somerfeld Avenue-Lotman Drive neighborhood, behind the mall.

One resident, unsuccessful City Council candidate Hugo Barbic, maintained the expansion plan "dwarfs our beach community." Barbic said the resulting increase in traffic will kill Capitola, which will die in its own "selfish and greedy objectives" for more sales-tax revenue.

Lotman Drive resident Lee Otter said the planned second department store "looms awfully large in terms of our neighborhood." He called for deleting the second department store as proposed in its current location.

Fellow resident Cheryl Gomez objected to the close proximity of a proposed Clares Street loop road to their neighborhood. That road is planned to run from Capitola Road near Bulb Avenue in a loop around to 41st Avenue.

An eight-foot-high sound wall will not mitigate "noise and air pollution," according to Gomez. Otter called for the loop road being set back at least 100 feet from the nearest residence on Somerfeld.

Susan Williamson, chief of the county's environmental planning sector, and Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the county's Transportation Commission, both objected to the draft EIR not taking into account the "cumulative" impacts of increased traffic from the mall expansion to surrounding areas.

Wilshusen said the draft EIR includes no mitigation measures for increased traffic on Highway 1, Soquel Avenue west of Gross Road or Capitola Road west of Lotman Avenue.

Wilshusen also called for bicycle lanes to be installed on 41st Avenue. Williamson added that the 7,000-square-foot branch library promised to be built by Capitola along with

mall expansion (as part of its redevelopment plan) was not included in the draft EIR.

The road improvements detailed in the report include the widening of 41st Avenue over Highway 1 from two to four lanes and signals to be installed on 41st at the main mall entrance, at 41st and Jade/Brommer and 38th Avenue and Capitola Road.

The draft report estimates mall expansion will generate an additional 9,400 vehicle trips in and out of the site daily. Presently, some 15,970 vehicles per day use the mall.

Scott Galloway, general manager of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, objected to the proposed transit center being moved to adjacent 41st Avenue. Presently, it is located next to Sears, at the mall itself.

The July 17 meeting — when action by commissioners is expected — will be held at 7 p.m. in the council chamber at City Hall.