

NORTH COUNTY TIMES

Train station plans released

Document available for public comment through Aug. 4

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SOLANA BEACH ---- The cost has gone up and the size has gone down for the long-awaited Solana Beach train station project, a city official said Friday.

Details of the proposal are in a draft environmental report released this week at City Hall. The city will accept comments on the 377-page report through Aug. 4.

The proposal calls for a large underground parking structure, restaurants, shops, offices, 132 apartments and a performing arts center that will be the new home of the North Coast Repertory Theater. The development will be built around the existing North County Transit District train station at Lomas Santa Fe Drive and North Santa Fe.

When the plan was presented at a series of public meetings in 2002, construction costs were estimated at \$40 million.

"That number keeps going up," Solana Beach's principal planner, Lori Naylor, said Friday. "We're now looking at \$50 million."

Construction costs everywhere have increased in recent years, as the costs of fuel, raw materials and labor have risen. Also, she said, the overall height of the various two- and three-story buildings in the project has been reduced.

"The developer has redesigned the project," she said.

Residential buildings have been reduced in height by as much as 8 feet, Naylor said, while commercial buildings have been reduced less. Also, she said, there's slightly less commercial and office space in the present version of the plan.

Solana Beach Mayor David Powell, in his State of the City address Wednesday, said construction of the train station project is "vital to the city's health."

Along with development along nearby Highway 101, Powell said, the train station project will provide much-needed tax revenue and "drive development in our downtown for the next 20 years."

Comments on the project that are submitted to the city by the deadline will be considered for inclusion in the final environmental report, expected to be presented to the City Council for approval in October. If the final report is approved, Naylor said, the council then will consider the actual project for approval.

If approved by the City Council, she said, the project also must be approved by the state Coastal Commission. It's hard to know how long that might take and when construction might begin, she said.

"The timeline there is a big question mark," Naylor said. "A majority of the excavated material from the underground parking garage is intended to be deposited on our beaches (at Fletcher Cove.) That in itself requires several permits from federal, state and regional agencies."

Construction of the parking garage is expected to take a year and must be completed before the rest of the work can begin, she said. The second phase, which includes all the residential and commercial structures, will take about 18 months.

Copies of the draft report are available at the city library, City Hall, and the city Web site at www.ci.solana-beach.ca.us.

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