

Cedros project praised, derided

Traffic, parking remain prime areas of concern

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SOLANA BEACH – A controversial mixed-use development at the Solana Beach train station is gaining support among residents, but the City Council yesterday tore apart the central elements of a study that must be approved before the development can go further.

Cedros Crossing, bounded by Coast Highway 101, Lomas Santa Fe Drive, North Cedros Avenue and Cliff Street, consists of:

- A 528-space, underground train station garage.
- About 11,000 square feet of office space.
- About 21,000 square feet of shops and restaurants.
- About 140 rental lofts with underground parking, a clubhouse and a pool.
- A new home for the North Coast Repertory Theatre, with a 350-seat main theater and a 150-seat auxiliary theater.

The development would produce about 73,000 cubic yards of sand during excavation for construction. That sand could be used to replenish the eroded beach at Fletcher Cove.

In a public hearing that attracted 45 residents yesterday, some City Council members cast doubt on the accuracy of the most important elements in the development's environmental impact review – traffic and parking – two hot-button issues that have been threatening to derail the project.

Mayor Lesa Heebner said she was skeptical that traffic coming in and out of the development would not worsen the city's congestion.

Consultants told her they had taken traffic counts during the summer county fair and horse-racing season and during the school year, when the worst congestion occurs. They found that the fair and the races did not increase traffic significantly on Lomas Santa Fe Drive, the main road leading to Interstate 5. By contrast, school traffic did.

AT ISSUE: CEDROS CROSSING

Cedros Crossing is a controversial residential, commercial, office and entertainment development proposed near the train station.

Supporters: It would give downtown an anchor, bring in tax revenue and provide a new home for the North Coast Repertory Theatre.

Opponents: It is too big, does not provide enough parking and would add to congestion on Coast Highway 101 and Lomas Santa Fe Drive.

Councilman Tom Campbell, apparently concerned about the adequacy of the train station parking garage, asked why the consultants concluded that demand for train station parking would increase by only 17 vehicles between 2005 and 2010.

Consultant Nicholas Abboud said the calculation was based on population growth in Solana Beach and surrounding areas. Council members told Abboud to include the projected increase in commuters because they expect more people to give up driving because of high gas prices and freeway congestion.

Answers to the council's concerns will be presented at the next public hearing March 24. However, it was not clear whether the council will decide whether to accept the environmental impact review then.

Yesterday was the first time residents who spoke in favor of the project outnumbered those who opposed it at a City Council meeting.

Many of the supporters were board members of the North Coast Repertory Theatre who are eager to find a new home for the theater company because it has outgrown its current location at Lomas Santa Fe Plaza.

"You have a good project here," said Dr. Allen Moffson, the theater's board president. "Do what is right for the city. It should be approved."

Another theater board member said building a development around a transit center would encourage the use of public transit and help reduce greenhouse gases.

Margaret Schlesinger and Marion Dodson, former mayors of the city, and Rich Brasher, a vice president for the nonprofit residents group Transit Alliance for a Better North County, also urged the council to approve the project.

"I totally support the theater," Schlesinger said. "It's important for us to have a cultural center."

Opponents voiced concerns about traffic and parking spilling over into surrounding neighborhoods.

"The residential units, theater, offices, retail and endless buses to and from the fairgrounds and races will all converge on Lomas Santa Fe and Cedros (a major intersection) and form a choke point. It will be staggering," resident Mike Ames said.

Fellow resident Karen McClune echoed Ames' feelings.

"I like the idea of a reasonable development, but I have serious concerns about traffic and parking," she said.

Resident Jim King said he wanted a smaller project.