

Cedros project inching forward

Cautious council sets new meeting

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SOLANA BEACH – Several aspects of the proposed Cedros Crossing development were once again vetted yesterday before the City Council, although a decision on the project's environmental impact report was tabled.

Council members asked for more analysis in several areas, such as aesthetics and traffic, but did close the public comment period on the EIR. The council scheduled a special meeting at 6 p.m. May 10 to hear further research by consultants.

The council streamlined the information it was requesting after consultants said additional traffic studies could take 60 days to complete. The proposed project's developer, Greg Shannon, vice president of development for Shea Properties, said that was too long since a draft of the environmental studies has been available since June.

“Sixty days is pretty much crippling to this project,” Shannon said. “We could probably just do analysis forever.”

The issues discussed yesterday included potential impacts of the proposed \$50 million development, including beach replenishment, aesthetics and traffic. Council members had various requests for more information, such as more simulated images – and perhaps models – of the proposed development.

The council voted 4-1 yesterday to close the public-comment period, with Councilman Thomas Campbell dissenting. Councilman David Roberts said the city could hold another public-comment hearing if it receives formal concerns from an organization about the project's environmental studies.

Yesterday's meeting, held in the council chambers, was the third public hearing on the project's environmental review. At one point, the council discussed whether to extend the public-comment period to a future date, but City Attorney James Lough recommended against that.

“We've gone through the comment period; we've gone through three days of testimony,” Lough said. “I think we have a universe of the issues.”

The proposed development would put commercial, entertainment, office and residential space next to the train station in the heart of Solana Beach. Supporters have said the project would anchor downtown, but some opponents have said it lacks enough parking and would increase traffic congestion.

The proposed Cedros Crossing development consists of:

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

In addition, the developer proposes excavating 61,000 cubic yards of sediment from the site and using it to replenish a stretch of beach south of Fletcher Cove.

Several dozen people attended the daylong hearing yesterday, with some coming and going throughout. After opening comments, a consultant gave a presentation on the proposed beach replenishment portion of the project.

Previously, an engineer had raised concerns about the replenishment. Scott Jenkins, principal development engineer with the Marine Physical Laboratory at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, had said the sediment could be finer than beach sand and could clog the San Dieguito Lagoon.

Chris Webb, a senior coastal scientist with Long Beach-based Moffatt & Nichol, responded to Jenkins' concerns, saying the sediment at the site contains an average of 84 percent sandy material and 16 percent silts and clays. He said the silts and clays could cause cloudiness in the water for several days, but would not significantly impact the lagoon.

“A lot of that stuff is going to go the other direction,” Webb said, adding that about half of the material would head north. “We don't think it would cause an impact.”

Brian Mooney, a principal with Jones & Stokes, the city's consultant, agreed. “The conclusion here is, yes, there is an effect,” he said. “But it is not a significant impact.”

Webb said the replenishment also would require permits from several other agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state Coastal Commission.

The council also discussed whether e-mailed concerns from Southern California Edison about the replenishment qualified as an official position on the project. City staff members and consultants suggested that a formal letter would constitute an official position.

Mayor Lesa Heebner began the meeting by saying the council wants sand on the beach, but doesn't want to put dirt there.

“The council asking questions about the EIR does not imply whatsoever disapproval of this project,” Heebner said. “We simply want to make sure that the right thing is being done.”