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Smart growth comes up for review in Solana Beach

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Solana Beach puts one issue behind it with a public vote and takes on another Saturday with the first of two public hearings on the environmental review for the Cedros Crossing train station project.

Hearings will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays March 10 and 24 in the council chambers. The council can schedule a vote on the environmental impact report later. Approval of the mixed use project itself requires a separate hearing and vote sequence.

The proposed development is part of a trend in urban-sprawl Southern California to build people-oriented live and work spaces along major transit corridors.

Cedros Crossing would provide 141 new residential units, 13 live/work spaces, office and retail space, and a home for the North Coast Repertory Theatre. In addition, it would create 524 below-grade parking spaces for train users, project residents and the public.

There is a lot to like about the project. It provides living spaces and activity in the town's core. More public parking spaces will be available for train station users and the public, whether people want to walk to Fletcher Cove or stroll the Cedros Boulevard Shopping District. Night life will pick up with the Rep's performances. In a town that is boosting its tourism tax two percentage points just to buy sand, this project will provide tens of thousands of cubic yards of it for beach replenishment.

Solana Beach faces a severe financial crunch in the next two or three years, one highlighted last year by David Powell in his State of the City address. This project will broaden the tax base and relieve the pressure on current taxpayers.

The EIR document runs 360 pages, 33 on traffic alone. Parking? Here's what the document says about demand 23 years from now: "...parking structure would be expected to satisfy the projected future demand and provide a buffer of 125 spaces during a typical weekday and 35 spaces during a typical weekend day."

Traffic is what transit-oriented development is all about. Every car in the train station parking lot represents one less car clogging I-5. The train station is served by major arterials Lomas Santa Fe and Villa de la Valle as well as Highway 101.

There are legitimate concerns and that is what the all-day hearings are for. Any major project can be revised and revised again. If the community wants even more parking, it can be added although increased height probably would be the trade-off.

The train station is a major asset for Solana Beach. Just ask Del Mar, which now rues letting it get away. This project can be a major economic engine for Solana Beach. Carlsbad, Oceanside and San Marcos are doing or contemplating similar projects.

Cedros Crossing is a project worth talking about, worth influencing, and, in our opinion, worth having.