

Forums set for development of train station property

ADAM KAYE
Staff Writer

SOLANA BEACH ---- The City Council on Monday is set to begin its dialogue with developers planning to build a residential and retail center at the Solana Beach train station.

In a special workshop set for 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, the council will meet with officials from a three-company team hired by North County Transit District to produce a development plan for the 4-acre site it owns on North Cedros Avenue.

"This is one of the very early steps in what's going to be a very long process," said Councilman Tom Golich, the city's representative on the transit district board.

The workshop will allow the council to convey to builders how it would like to see the property developed, Golich said.

Selected in October by the transit district, the development team includes Del Mar-based Sedona Pacific Corporation and two companies from Los Angeles, developer Watt Commercial Properties and RTKL Architects.

A second workshop, scheduled specifically to collect the public's input on the proposed project, is set for 6:30 p.m. March 5 at the Del Mar Hilton Hotel, 15575 Jimmy Durante Blvd., Del Mar.

The city's vision for the site historically has clashed with the transit district's plans.

While Solana Beach has asked for housing, shops that serve residents and a parking garage, the transit district has sought to develop the site to maximize its revenue potential.

Greg Shannon, Sedona Pacific's president and CEO, said Friday he expects to submit plans to the transit district this summer. The plans would include traffic and train ridership studies.

Once submitted, developers and transit district officials will negotiate a 55-year lease based upon the property's uses.

According to Shannon, discussions at the upcoming workshops will focus and expand upon plans the city council approved in 1991.

While some elements of the plan were realized ---- construction of the train station, the \$18 million project to lower the railroad below street level and construction of a Lomas Santa Fe Drive bridge spanning the railroad ---- "market conditions and other priorities by NCTD" kept the mixed-use center from being built, Shannon said.

Two ideas for the mixed-use center, a cinema and a health club, would not be viable today, he said.

From an engineering standpoint, a proposed bridge to link Highway 101 to a proposed parking garage would be unfeasible without "a very long ramp," Shannon said.

The last time the transit district board of directors debated development ideas for the transit center two years ago, some directors opposed building the housing units Solana Beach proposed. County Supervisor Bill Horn said he wanted to see the center build over the train tracks, to expand its commercial space.

Jim Cunningham, the transit district's manager of real estate services, was unavailable for comment Friday.

Tom Kelleher, a transit district spokesman, said the transit district will work with the city to agree upon a plan for the facility.

Contact staff writer Adam Kaye at (760) 943-2312 or akaye@nctimes.com.

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