

Commission Approves Riverpark

The Planning Commission unanimously approved the development; expected to go to the City Council.

The Signal News, September 2, 2004 by Judy O'Rourke

Against opposition from a number of environmental groups and local residents, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve the Riverpark development planned for the north shore of the Santa Clara River.

The formality of preparing documents is all that remains for the Commission's Oct. 5 meeting, when it is expected the project will be recommended to the Santa Clarita City Council for approval.

"There were substantial changes from the original project description when the Planning Commission first saw it compared to today," said Jeff Hogan, associate planner for the city. "These were a direct result of a lot of the public comments."

Changes include "moving back the development from the river, providing 25 percent of the costs for the pedestrian bridge that was never part of proposal, and moving the equestrian trail out of the river and along the development," he said.

The Commission met Tuesday evening for the 10th time to consider this project. The process included nine public hearings and a site tour. Tuesday's meeting was the last public hearing before the Commission for the Riverpark development.

Hogan said commissioners resolved their remaining concerns. They felt the revised site plan addressed all outstanding issues, and felt comfortable with recommending the project to the Council, he said.

Most of the people who spoke tonight spoke at previous hearings," said Marlee Lauffer, spokeswoman for Newhall Land and Farming Co., the developer of the project. "All of the subjects — traffic, air quality, endangered species, the river, schools — have been analyzed and addressed by the Commission and in written documents as well."

The Riverpark project and Newhall Land will be providing the land and partial funding for the cross valley connector, which is due to ease traffic on Soledad Canyon Road. The thoroughfare will eventually link state Route 14 at Golden Valley Road with Interstate 5 at Highway 126.

During a recess in the meeting, Commissioner Dennis Ostrom said the public's input has had an impact.

"A lot of ideas we come up with, changes, are a synthesis of things they came up with," he said. "That's what we have here, an exchange of ideas. The process keeps us on our toes."

He said the Commission has carefully evaluated the technical merits of the infrastructure of the project — including water, traffic, aesthetics, quality of life and schools.

Five individuals spoke in favor of the development, four of whom cited construction of the cross valley connector as a significant benefit of the project.

"Completion of the roadway is the No. 1 priority for the city," said Connie Worden Roberts, co-chair of the Santa Clarita Valley Transportation Alliance.

Individuals speaking on behalf of the Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment, the Center for Biological Diversity, the National Audubon Society, Ventura Coastkeepers, Friends of the Santa Clara River, the Sierra Club and The River Project voiced opposition to the development, in addition to a number of local residents.

“Why is this project being built?” asked Henry Schultz, from the Sierra Club. “The only thing we’ve heard is the cross valley connector. At buildout, the traffic is going to be worse.”

Toward the conclusion of the evening, the commissioners and their staff discussed the remaining outstanding issues, including proposed adjustment, off-site dedication of land and Santa Clarita Parkway.

The project would add 439 single-family homes and 744 multi-family units to a nearly 2-mile-long stretch of land extending eastward from the dead end of Newhall Ranch Road near Bouquet Canyon Road.

The Commission will review the project’s documents at an Oct. 5 meeting. The matter could potentially be heard by the City Council at its second meeting in November, and at subsequent meetings in December and January. Action could be taken as early as next year, Hogan said.