

Staples Ranch Decision Delayed

February 12, 2009

A discussion of the Staples Ranch development in Pleasanton was continued last Tuesday to a meeting on Feb. 24. Under Pleasanton City Council rules, any councilmember can continue any item up until the time a motion is on the floor. Councilmember Matt Sullivan continued the matter following the public hearing.

Most of the comments during the hearing were in support of extending Stoneridge Drive. Sullivan stated that, as noticed, the council was not scheduled to consider the extension. Because of that, he believed that those who may be opposed to building the road through to El Charro did not attend the meeting.

Sullivan felt that the council majority was prepared to direct staff to proceed with plans to build the road along with the development. The three who appeared to be in favor of moving forward with the road were Mayor Jennifer Hosterman, and Councilmembers Cheryl Cook-Kallio and Jerry Thorne.

Sullivan commented, "We heard a lot of input on something that is not on the agenda, the extension of Stoneridge Drive. The matter was advertised as a discussion of the environmental impact report and the memorandum of understanding (MOU)."

The MOU with Alameda County calls for retention of the right-of-way for a future extension of the roadway. However, the county would now like to have the road built at the same time other development on Staples Ranch takes place. A letter to the city, signed by Supervisor Scott Haggerty, offers to pay \$5 million to build the extension and provide Pleasanton an additional \$1 million for other traffic mitigation projects.

The city council had previously voted to retain the right-of-way and build the road once an agreement had been reached with regard to regional roadway improvements and funding them. City Manager Nelson Fialho had requested that the council schedule a separate meeting for the discussion of the Stoneridge extension. He said that at that time there would be more details on Haggerty's proposal, as well as CEQA options (California Environmental Quality Act). The extension is not directly addressed in the Staples Ranch EIR.

In addition to the question of the road, several environmental groups raised the issue of mitigation for the Spearscale, a plant considered to be threatened.

With the continuation, members of the council asked that staff provide additional information on a number of issues. Cook-Kallio and Thorne wanted information on what is contained in the EIR that addresses Stoneridge Drive going through Staples Ranch. Cook-Kallio stated, "I think the answers to CEQA are contained in this document. I don't want to separate the road issue from this EIR."

McGovern asked staff to meet with environmental groups to see what changes could be made in the EIR to address the issue of the Spearscale. She also wanted to look at moving the proposed ice arena further away from the arroyo. As for Stoneridge Drive, McGovern wanted an optional alignment that did not go through the community park. She felt the current alignment would be a safety hazard.

Sullivan asked that staff in advertising the meeting make it clear the council would be discussing approving the Stoneridge extension. Hosterman asked for an update on regional talks regarding transportation projects.

Staples Ranch is a 124 acre parcel on the eastside of Pleasanton. The proposal studied as the preferred plan in the EIR provides for a 37-acre auto mall, 45-acre continuing care senior housing, an 11-acre commercial site, a 17-acre community park and a 5-acre neighborhood park. The community park contains an ice arena which, if approved, would be built by the San Jose Sharks, a professional ice hockey team. Access to the auto mall and the ice arena would be from El Charro Road. Stoneridge Drive would end in a cul-de-sac. Emergency vehicle access would be available to allow access from the east to Pleasanton.

The EIR notes there are several impacts that cannot be mitigated. One is the visual loss, the change from a rural setting to an urban one. The second is air quality, which the report states would exceed thresholds even with mitigation measures. The third impact is traffic congestion. There would be impacts on three intersections; two could not be mitigated. Certification of the EIR does not mean that any of the proposed development has been approved. They would all be subject to the city's normal approval process.

The issue of the threatened plant was raised by representatives of the Alameda Creek Alliance, the Tri-Valley Sierra Club, and a member of the Ohlone Audubon. They all felt that the Spearscale issue had not been addressed by the EIR. Stuart Cook, a representative of the Alameda County Surplus Property Authority, argued that the county had mitigated for the plant in the mid-1990s as part of a plan that allowed for changes in the alignment of the arroyo. However, the environmental groups noted that mitigation for one project does not account for the plants that are still on the property. Current conditions should be addressed.

Matt Morrison, president of the Tri-Valley Sierra Club, asked that the council hold off certifying the EIR until proper mitigation for the plant is in place. Rich Cimino of the Audubon Society, agreed with his request. Alameda Creek Alliance Conservation Director Ralph Kanz said the goal of his organization was for Pleasanton to have a legally defensible CEQA document. "From our view, you do not. The Spearscale needs to be mitigated."

LAFCo, the agency responsible for approving annexations, raised the question of the adequacy of an analysis of a Stoneridge Drive extension. Mona Palacios, executive officer of LAFCo, told the council that the analysis of the extension could take the form of an additional alternative or as a mitigation measure to the traffic impacts of the project. "If such an analysis does not appear in the certified EIR, LAFCo may need to conduct its own environmental review before taking action on the proposed annexation." Palacios also noted that there is no mitigation identified in the EIR for the loss of 74 acres of identified prime agricultural land.

The majority of those speaking urged the council to move forward with building Stoneridge Drive through to El Charro Road. Comments included the following: it would be fiscally irresponsible not to accept the county's offer to pay to construct the road; delays would only increase the cost. Extending the road would provide Pleasanton residents access to the auto mall and the ice arena without having to use I-580. The road would improve circulation in the region.

There were several speakers who did not support the extension. They said that unless freeway improvements were made, the road would become a second freeway right through the city.

Pat Cashman, executive director of the Surplus Property Authority, urged the council to include building the road as part of the approval. "No solution will satisfy everyone. It is imperative that Stoneridge be part of the project. The project is in jeopardy if the road is not included. I believe the EIR did adequately study the extension of Stoneridge. I don't believe much additional study, if any, would be needed."

No one spoke against the development proposals. Speakers cited the jobs, tax revenues, and recreational opportunities the development would bring to the city. Some were concerned that delays in approval would result in the county turning to Livermore or Dublin for the development.