

Staples Ranch retirement community, auto mall expected to win Pleasanton City Council approval tonight

Opponents, proponents agree to final plan for multi-million-dollar development after five years of debate

by **Jeb Bing**
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Development of the 124-acre Staples Ranch property at Pleasanton's northeast corner could get under way early next year following an agreement by the city, environmental groups and Alameda County, which owns the land, over issues that have been debated over several years.

The City Council has scheduled a special meeting for 6:30 p.m. tonight to ratify the agreement that will allow the construction of a complex for seniors, a new auto mall, and eventually a retail center and public ice arena.

The agreement will also allow Stoneridge Drive to be extended to El Charro Road once Livermore extends Jack London Boulevard on the east side of El Charro to Isabel Road, which the City Council of Livermore has approved.

That project has been delayed, however, until new developers are found for an outlet mall at the northeast corner of El Charro and I-580, whose development would pay most of the costs of extending Jack London.

Although the Staples Ranch master plan has been approved, long-time opponents of the development have held up to the project from moving forward over environmental concerns. Those have been withdrawn after a near-\$1-million settlement aimed at protecting wildlife habitat.

In a statement issued by Ralph Kanz of the Alameda Creek Alliance, Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity and Patrick Cashman of the Alameda County Surplus Property Authority, the organization's announced that they have signed a mitigation agreement "allowing the proposed 124-acre Staples Ranch development in Pleasanton to move forward while providing up to \$925,000 in funding to enhance creek vegetation along Arroyo Mocho and acquire and protect habitat for rare plants."

If the final development plan is approved Aug. 24, Cashman and the city of Pleasanton will ask LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation Commission of Alameda County, to annex Staples Ranch so that development can get under way, a process that could take six months. That moves the earliest date for CLC to start construction on its first Northern California retirement community well into 2011.

Mayor Jennifer Hosterman is a member of the board of LAFCO and could possibly

expedite a LAFCO public hearing on the annexation petition, where there appears to be no opposition. She is seeking re-election as Pleasanton's mayor in the municipal election Nov. 2 and would need to keep her post to remain as a member of the LAFCO board.

Public hearings on Staples Ranch and City Council action to approve the final development plans will come in two stages, with the most important hearing on the supplement EIR and Stoneridge Drive considerations on Aug. 24. A second hearing would come at the council's regular meeting Sept. 7 to approve specific development plans, with time set aside at its meeting on Sept. 21 if additional actions need to be taken.

City Manager Nelson Fialho, who has spearheaded negotiations on Staples Ranch development issues with Steven Bocian, assistant city manager, and Brian Dolan, director of community development, said he believes all of the groups that have been involved in the Staples issue "are now on the same page."

"I'm confident that we have an agreement in place that the council can accept on Aug. 24," he said.

If approved, specific projects would be able to get under way once the property is annexed into the city. These include:

- * Stoneridge Creek Pleasanton, a 45-acre senior continuing care community to be developed by Continuing Life Communities (CLC), with up to 800 units for assisted living, skilled nursing and independent living residents.

- * Hendrick Automotive Group, which wants to build a new auto mall on its 37-acre portion of Staples, next to the junction of I-580 and El Charro Road, directly across El Charro from a the 160-plus store outlet mall that Livermore has approved, but where a new developer is being sought.

The plan for Staples also include 11 acres set aside for future use as a retail center and about 17 acres identified as parkland, with about 10 acres earmarked for a two-story, four rink facility to be built by San Jose Arena Management, a subsidiary of the San Jose Sharks.

Troy Bourne of CLC said his firm is ready to build the independent living and assisted care facility as soon as the plan is approved and Staples is annexed. Several hundred applications have been submitted for units in the independent living section of Stoneridge Creek, with deposits ranging from \$1,000 and higher.

Since applicants must be in good health at the time their applications are accepted, Bourne urged the council to give its final approval on the project so everyone who wants to move into CLC will be able to do so.

The extension of Stoneridge Drive has been the most controversial part of the Staples Ranch plan and the cause of repeated delays in actions by both the Planning Commission

and the City Council.

The new agreement, to be voted on Aug. 24, appears to satisfy both proponents and opponents. It allows Stoneridge to be extended as a two-lane thoroughfare but barricaded before it reaches El Charro. The barricade would be removed for public use of the roadway once Jack London Boulevard is opened on the other side, which could take several years. Separate entrances would be made available to the auto mall and the Stoneridge Creek complex.

Alameda County will pay for the extension and the construction of two four-lane-wide bridges with the city of Pleasanton spending an estimated \$600,000 for "noise attenuating pavement" on Stoneridge between Santa Rita Road and Kamp Drive and to extend the soundwall on Stoneridge to Trevor Parkway.

Eventually, according to tonight's proposed agreement, Stoneridge could be widened to four lanes from El Charro to Santa Rita, but only after Jack London Boulevard is extended on the Livermore side and additional public hearings are held.