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Pedestrian bridges nixed

Developer says Sunrise-Douglas overcrossings would block view at Anatolia Marketplace.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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Faced with increasing opposition from neighborhood residents, business leaders and pedestrian and bicycle advocates, the Rancho Cordova City Council reluctantly backed away from a measure that would allow construction of pedestrian overcrossings at a busy intersection.

The council Monday night directed staff members to work with developers of Anatolia Marketplace to secure easements for walkways instead of easements for pedestrian bridges at Sunrise Boulevard and Douglas Road.

Though the overcrossings would not be built immediately, staff members said it was important to preserve the option. Planning Director Paul Junker said the approximately 17,000 homes planned in the Sunrise-Douglas area -- the equivalent of a mid-size city in Northern California -- one day would be separated from the rest of Rancho Cordova by six-lane roads.

"About 50,000 residents would be separated with no way to get across those roadways," he said.

But Tim Taron, an attorney for AKT Properties, developer of the planned 125,529-square-foot shopping center on the southeast corner of Sunrise and Douglas, said the overcrossings would block the view of the center's plaza area and its anchor tenant, a Raley's supermarket.

Taron said the developer would support retrofitting the intersection with safety features, such as pedestrian refuges in the medians, as an alternative to the overcrossings.

"If you impose (the overcrossing easements), we will be delayed because we will have to go back and redesign the center," Taron said.

In addition to a supermarket, the current design includes a gas station with carwash, a fast-food restaurant and five multi-tenant retail buildings.

The developer was encouraged to construct buildings close to the street to create more of a lifestyle center and a place where people would gather, Taron said.

"We would never have designed buildings here if we knew there were going to be two

bridges," he said.

Residents of the neighboring Anatolia subdivision urged the council to avoid any action that would delay construction of the shopping center. Several said they feel more like Folsom residents because it is easier to drive there than to fight traffic on Sunrise and Douglas to reach retail areas in Rancho Cordova.

John Hartman said he moved to Anatolia from the Natomas area about eight months ago. Delays in commercial development in the Natomas area, he said, detrimentally affected home values there.

"We would like to have resources in our community," Hartman said.

Rex Albright, chief executive officer of the Rancho Cordova Chamber of Commerce, urged the council to approve the shopping center design without the easements for overcrossings. He argued the pedestrian bridges at that location run counter to efforts to improve Rancho Cordova's visual image.

He also stressed the importance of providing neighborhood shopping opportunities for residents of the developing area.

"We need to get this project completed," Albright said.

Walt Seifert, a spokesman for Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates, said the group also opposed the overcrossings, arguing that they would reduce rather than increase safety, and likely would not be used by pedestrians or bicyclists.

"They might end up being a white elephant for the city," he said.

Seifert said the group does not object to grade-separated overcrossings that connect sections of trails and suggested pedestrian bridges are more appropriate at mid-block locations than at intersections.

Anne Geraghty of WalkSacramento told the council, "I commend you and your staff for wanting to make Rancho Cordova walkable and bikeable."

But, she said, pedestrians often don't feel safe using overcrossings. She suggested area residents would be better served by an intersection with safety features such as zebra-striped crosswalks, pedestrian refuges and signals with countdown devices that let people know how much time they have to cross.

City Council members said they were torn between wanting to preserve the option for overcrossings and not wanting to delay a desirable commercial development.

"We have to choose between two competing public needs," Vice Mayor Linda Budge said.

"The shopping center is exactly what's needed," Budge said, arguing that it is important to get the project under way as soon as possible.

At the same time, Councilman Bob McGarvey said, "We still need to give the council some flexibility in the future."

McGarvey said the development community should pay for retrofitting the Sunrise-Douglas intersection with safety features for at-grade crossings.

Council members said they also would consider the potential for overcrossings of Douglas east of the shopping center and of Sunrise south of the center, near Herodian Drive.

A pedestrian bridge at either of those locations would not affect construction of Anatolia Marketplace.

Approval of the shopping center design with the pedestrian walkway easements is expected at the council's Feb. 19 meeting.

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