

Wednesday, August 2, 2006

Last modified Monday, July 24, 2006 5:06 PM PDT

2,464 homes eyed for Montosa Ranch development near Amado

By Manuel C. Coppola

The Santa Cruz County Planning and Zoning Commission is scheduled to review the proposed 2,464-home Montosa Ranch development east of Amado at a 1 p.m. hearing on Thursday.

The developers, The Molera Alvarez Group, plan to "address all concerns on a factual basis backed by studies" conducted on the impact the project will have on the environment, water supply, roads, and the economy, said Manuel Molera, a principal of the firm. "We want to expose some of the myths that have been brought out."

This is the second incarnation of the master-planned community in which owner Tim Bunn culled the density from 3,800 to 2,464 homes on 624 acres, leaving nearly 30 percent of the land as open space. Bunn would require a zoning change to allow the proposed density of about four homes per acre. The estimated cost of the project is about \$581.2 million and could take six years to build.

Molera said the proposed development will include single family units, many of which would target first-time home buyers. The houses would range in price from \$180,000 to \$500,000, with an average price of \$310,000.

In summary, an economic study conducted by Elliott D. Pollack & Co., of Scottsdale states "the project will generate 921 direct jobs annually for the six-year construction phase. About \$19.9 million in direct wages will be generated based on the annual construction activity of \$96.9 million. Another 614 indirect and induced jobs will be created annually in the local economy.

"Annual wages for these ... employees is about \$17.6 million," the consultant found. The combined wages are expected to stimulate \$142 million "in economic activity," according to the report.

"At build-out, Santa Cruz County is expected to receive increased revenues from some sales taxes, property taxes and increased state revenue sharing, the report said.

The Santa Cruz Valley Unified School District No. 35 "will collect an estimated \$1.7 million annually in property taxes," the study found.

Molera said the project includes bike paths, wildlife corridors, a bird sanctuary and seven acres for a school site adjoined by an additional

seven acres of "park area" where school sports fields and playgrounds can be located.

Tax base impact

"We believe this is a very beneficial project for Santa Cruz County," Molera said. "In order to progress, we need to build up our tax base. This project will do that. Also, price range of some of the homes is very affordable to first-time buyers, something that is sorely lacking in this area."

Despite the promising economic potential, some area residents are opposing the project saying Montosa would strain water reserves, create congestion, and adversely affect the environment.

Recently, officials at the Mount Hopkins Smithsonian Observatory told county officials they object to the rezoning request as the proposed project would cause irreversible damage to the dark-sky environment.

The meeting is scheduled Thursday at 1 p.m. at the DeAnza RV Park on East Frontage Road just south of the Arivaca Exit No. 48 off Interstate 19. The public is welcomed to attend.