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Board denies bid to change zoning and build 2,500 homes near Amado area

By Gabriel R. Romero

A rezoning request that would allow a developer to build nearly 2,500 homes near Amado was nixed Thursday much to the delight of opponents. About 200 people attended a meeting of the Santa Cruz County Planning and Zoning Commission.

The commission voted unanimously to recommend that the board of supervisors deny a request by the Molera Alvarez Group to reclassify 624 acres of land from ranch to a combination of low-, medium- and high-density residential zoning.

Montosa Ranch

Included in the so-called Montosa Ranch Master Planned Community are a school and park site as well as bike trails and a bird sanctuary. The development would allow for 25 percent of open space for wildlife corridors as well.

Access was also an issue. Because nearby Amado Montosa Road is a rural two-lane route, the developers, based in Phoenix, proposed widening it to four 12-foot lanes to accommodate the increased traffic the project would bring.

According to a traffic study presented by the developer, about 23,000 trips would be conducted per day by 12,000 vehicles traversing the road.

The road would be the only access into the development although Molera Alvarez Group has proposed a secondary access north of Amado near Elephant Head Bridge.

The development would have two wells, but the Arizona Department of Water Resources has not issued a certificate of 100-Year Water Adequacy as required before the development could get under way.

In an interview after the meeting, Commissioner Susan Clarke Morales said, Molera Alvarez "didn't address the issue of flooding sufficiently. It was not well presented and it wasn't well thought out."

At the meeting held at the DeAnza Trails RV Resort, several people spoke out against the development saying the proposed project would have a negative effect on the county.

Only one person spoke in favor of the development.

The Rio Rico resident said he liked the proposal because it would offer him a job as a construction worker and help him to live comfortably while raising a family.

Mary Dahl, director of the county's community planning department said at the meeting that the county had received several letters opposing the development and no letters in support to which those in attendance clapped and cheered.

The development had been brought before the commission in June of last year and received a recommendation for denial. It was later withdrawn from consideration by the developer.

This time the developer reduced the density from about 3,800 homes to 2,464 units.

Jamie Molera, a partner in the group, said in a post-meeting interview his firm would continue promoting the project.

"I think that specific area is against development, and the meeting went pretty much as expected," he said. "We knew that there was going to be a lot of (hostility) and people who didn't want to listen to the facts."

Molera said the group conducted a countywide poll that showed about 60 percent of the residents in support of a development like Montosa.

He said that once the case was taken before the board of supervisors and more community residents knew about the project, more interest would be shown in it.

Dhal said she did not know when the supervisors would take action on the proposed reclassification although she said the earliest was four to six weeks.