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One Thing at a Time for Environmental Report

By Cathy Tyson

"We are not certifying the EIR (Environmental Impact Report) tonight," said Chair Thomas Chastain of the Planning Commission. Although at times it seems like a never ending process, the EIR - a component of the Downtown Specific Plan - is moving ever so slowly forward. The meager audience in attendance for the September 8 Planning Commission meeting indicated a certain lack of enthusiasm at this point in the process or that no action on the Final EIR was scheduled, only a presentation of an overview of the document.

The Draft EIR was released on January 26, 2010: "It identified the likely environmental consequences associated with the (Downtown Specific) Plan, and identified policies contained in the Plan to reduce potentially significant impact," said Ann Merideth, Community Development Director, in a staff report.

Merideth noted that the next step is to consider certification of the EIR before a Plan is adopted. To be certified, the EIR needs to meet the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) regulations. Because the Revised Specific Plan will not be considered until early 2011, certification will be placed on hold until the Planning Commission completes its review of the Plan. A chicken and egg situation, to be sure.

"This is information that allows us to sharpen our discussion," said Chastain, referring to the environmental report as the Planning Commission continues to develop its recommendations for the revised Plan.

Indeed after this matter was addressed, the very next item on the agenda was the Revised Draft Downtown Specific Plan Review: Civic and Cultural District. Staff now recommends that the area be renamed the Plaza/Golden Gate Way Overlay or District, along with a host of other recommendations. It was last discussed by the Planning Commission in December 2009. The City Council is scheduled to receive an update from the Planning Commission on the progress of the Downtown Specific Plan at its September 13 meeting.

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