

Serrano ‘Far Side’ projects sail through Planning Commission

By Mike Roberts | Village Life staff writer | March 16, 2010 11:20

Serrano Captain Kirk Bone sailed his three easterly-most projects into unusually strong headwinds, but eventually won support of the Planning Commission at its March 11 meeting.

If approved by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, the planned developments and tentative parcel maps for two more residential villages and a neighborhood commercial center, all east of Bass Lake Road, will help position Parker Development for an eventual real estate rebound.

The current application process began in 2007. According to Bone, the voyage was inspired by development agreement expiration dates rather than any urgency to build the proposed projects in the current down market.

The three project submissions continued Serrano’s reputation of dotted Is and crossed Ts. Given their track record of well executed projects that have generated millions of dollars in county development fees and property taxes, Bone and first mate Andrea Howard might have expected smoother sailing.

But Senior Planner Pierre Rivas made it clear early on that despite friendly relations, a down market and a lean Planning staff, he wouldn’t roll over for the county’s largest residential developer.

Rivas opposed a car wash site in the proposed commercial center, and tried to limit any significant variance from commercial building sizes specified in the existing development plan.

In the end however, the Planning Commission recommended approval of all three projects on the “far side” of Serrano more-or-less as proposed.

Commercial center

Serrano’s long-discussed but still unnamed and unbuilt neighborhood commercial project lies east of Bass Lake Road at the terminus of Serrano Parkway.

The commissioners recently recommended approval of the first phase, with 115,000 square feet of mostly retail space, including a 65,000-square-foot anchor store, several smaller buildings and a gas station.

The second phase sits on 4.5 acres immediately to the north, and will contain an additional 32,864 square feet of commercial space and a second gas station.

Bone asked for flexibility in the size of the proposed commercial buildings in order to attract tenants. But El Dorado County’s traditional development agreement requires building sizes and uses to be narrowly defined prior to approval.

An alternate planning paradigm called “form-based coding,” currently being discussed at committee level, is less rules-based, and would allow more flexibility later in the planning process.

“We don’t know what the retail world is going to look like when this economy recovers,” said Bone. “I don’t want to find myself with a potential tenant that is going to kick off another two-year county approval process.”

The commission agreed, and recommended increasing the allowed fluctuation in building size from 10 to 25 percent for buildings in the commercial center, as long as the overall project size doesn’t expand.

Rivas was also concerned about potential noise complaints from a car wash at the periphery of the commercial center.

Citing a noise study that shows the car wash barely over the sound threshold, Serrano attorney Michael Cook explained that a sound wall and other acoustic dampening measures would lower the noise level substantially.

“These projects are part of Serrano,” Bone reassured the commissioners. “If we thought we couldn’t do this the right way, or were creating problems for our residents, we just wouldn’t do it.”

The car wash eventually passed muster with limited hours of operation, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Frontage improvements

Parker Development is obligated to widen and improve Bass Lake Road through the project area, including frontage improvements, and has dedicated a 120-foot swath of land which encompasses the current Bass Lake Road alignment for that purpose.

Bone tried in vain to get the “frontage improvements” defined in the project’s conditions of approval. “Let’s get this done now rather than three or four years down the road when different people are involved.”

But El Dorado County Department of Transportation engineers have yet to determine the road’s final alignment. Frontage improvements can’t be accurately accessed yet, said Deputy DOT Director Craig McKibbin.

McKibbin and Bone agreed that it would be more cost effective for DOT to perform the improvements in conjunction with road construction. The only question is the cost, which is Serrano’s responsibility.

Bone still hopes to get an agreement hammered out with DOT before the April board meeting.

Widening the south end of Bass Lake Road, much of which is already complete, combined with the new Silver Springs Parkway on the north end, creates an important new four-lane connector between Green Valley Road and Highway 50, almost entirely financed by development.

Bass Lake community activist John Thomson argued for Serrano to continue their improvements north to include the last piece of unimproved pavement, a third of a mile of old two-lane blacktop in front of the Bridlewood Subdivision.

DOT Engineer Eileen Crawford explained that the last segment is on DOT's radar after Silver Springs Parkway, but only when funds are available.

Village J5/J6 and J7

The commission also recommended approval of the development plans, tentative subdivision maps and exemptions from further environmental reporting for two residential projects, Village J5/J6 and J7.

Village J5/J6 consists of 204 clustered "halfplex" homes directly northeast of the commercial center. Immediately to the east, Village J7 contains 71 clustered lots on 9.8 acres in a slightly denser "six-pack" configuration. At the request of the El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Committee, only six of the lots will contain three story homes, with none adjacent to Bridlewood.

The Mediterranean-style architecture, earth tone colors and materials will be consistent with, albeit denser than existing homes in the area. The design includes property line setbacks as low as 3 feet, and some shared walls. Fire sprinklers will be installed in each home.

Primary access to the two new villages will be from entrances on Bass Lake Road. A new road along the eastern boundary of the projects will connect them with the commercial center, and provide emergency access to Bridlewood via Birmingham Road.

Both villages are near the Bass Lake overflow, and will be constructed above its 1,241 foot crest elevation. Runoff will be routed away from the overflow.

A school site in Village J5 was moved to the northeastern corner of Bass Lake Road and Serrano Parkway, necessitating some rezoning.

Two parks serve Village J, a 2.28 acre neighborhood park in Village J5/J6 and a 12.5-acre community park west of Bass Lake in Village J2/J3.

Bone said that none of the projects will be built until the real estate market improves. The next step in the approval process is a tentatively scheduled April 13 Board of Supervisors meeting.

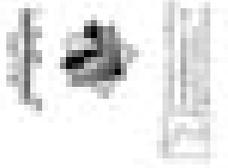
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PHASE I CONSTRUCTION PERMITS
FOR THE BASS LAKE OVERFLOW



Bass Lake



Neighborhood Center
Center Phase I

Young Drive

Bass Lake
Overflow

Bass Lake Road

Young Drive

Young Drive