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## Planners Give OK to Riverpark Revisions Made in Project

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SANTA CLARITA - A development of more than 1,100 homes has been recommended for approval by the city's Planning Commission after several revisions that would add more open space and fewer houses. The commissioners voted unanimously over the concerns of environmentalists who say the project, known as Riverpark and proposed by The Newhall Land and Farming Co., will add more traffic, increase air pollution and contribute to the ultimate destruction of the Santa Clara River.

As part of project, Newhall Land agreed to contribute to the construction of the Cross Valley Connector, a portion from Bouquet Canyon Road to Soledad Canyon Road, which will connect Newhall Ranch Road to Golden Valley Road, a fact not lost on environmental groups. They have said completion of the connector, an eight-mile stretch between the Golden State and Antelope Valley freeways, is taking precedence over the quality of life in Santa Clarita.

Developers would be funding \$25 million in right-of-way dedications and fees from Bouquet through their land holdings. That portion of the project needs \$45 million to complete.

Teresa Savaikie, who spoke Tuesday night on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity.

More than 40 people from various environmental groups held a rally outside of the City Hall to protest what was expected to be an approval.

"No matter what we said, it felt like they already had baked the cake and they just were waiting to add frosting," Savaikie said. "But we're not going to give up. I believe there's still hope to direct positive change to that project. There's still the City Council approval and then appeals we can make."

But commissioners believed that the overall project would benefit the community at large. Riverpark would be built on 695 acres and include 424 single-family homes, 380 town homes and 324 apartments as well as more than 24 acres of open space within the central canyon and an adjacent five-acre neighborhood park at the mouth of the canyon. In addition, developers are also proposing to dedicate more than 300 acres in the Santa Clara River area as natural open space to the city of Santa Clarita.

The development would span east of Newhall Ranch and Bouquet Canyon roads, north of the Santa Clara River.

The city's General Plan, the blueprint for

growth in Santa Clarita, allowed for more than 3,000 homes and apartments. Newhall Land opted for 1,128. "I think the project is a lot different than when it was brought to the commission several months ago, which was the result of the public comments in regard to pushing the project further back from the river, the building of the pedestrian bridge, which (Newhall Land) will pay 25 percent of the cost," said the city's Assistant Planner Jeff Hogan. "The commission really listened and worked with the project."

Planning Commissioner Rick Winsman said the project will make a positive contribution to Santa Clarita's overall infrastructure as well as alleviate housing shortages. Ultimately, leaving the land as open space would have been the best-case scenario, he said.

"The Cross Valley Connector is certainly a major consideration point," he said. "But this is a project that's going to benefit everyone. There are people who say, If you don't build it, then they won't come. But the truth is our population is growing internally, with births, and the children of our residents who want to live here need somewhere to live."

Developers agreed to several conditions, including setting back homes farther from the river's edge.

"To me, it's pretty disappointing," said

"We were very pleased to have the Planning Commission process behind us," said Newhall Land spokeswoman Marlee Lauffer. "We believe the Planning Commission considered it thoroughly."

Aside from its suggested impact on the river, other environmentalists remained concerned about additional water pumping, and cultural and archaeological significance of the land.

Earlier this year, an environmental impact report found that archaeological sites dating back to ancient times were found on portions of the land proposed for the Riverpark project, but developers plan to preserve part of the area as open space. Among the findings on one site just north of the Santa Clara River were tools, bowl fragments and other artifacts that show evidence of a village dating back 3,500 years, the report concluded.

In addition, the Western spadefoot toad, a California native and species of concern, had been found earlier this year at the project site in three season ponds, prompting an addendum to the environmental impact report. However, the toads were not there in 2002 and 2003, federal wildlife inspectors had said.