

Whole Foods takes site at The Alameda at Stockton

Business association, neighbors hope to see more foot traffic

By MARY GOTTSCHALK

While shopping along The Alameda is taking a hit with the coming closure of For Your Journey and Indian Motorcycles, it is getting a boost from Whole Foods Market's plans to open its first San Jose store on The Alameda in 2007.

Whole Foods plans a 45,000-square-foot store at the corner of The Alameda and Stockton Avenue, now the site of Q & Brew.

In addition to selling natural and organic food, Whole Foods will incorporate a Salud! Cooking & Lifestyle School with classes in cooking, nutrition and fitness. It also plans a sidewalk café with hot and cold entrees.

While Whole Foods will undoubtedly generate additional foot traffic, it will be too late to help them, say the operators of For Your Journey and Indian Motorcycles.

Both cite a lack of business as their reason for closing.

"It's been really, really fun. It's sad to see it go away, but if you don't support it, it can't stay," says Donna Lopez, who opened For Your Journey in September 2003 and will close it on Oct. 22.

Lopez says The Alameda is not conducive to shopping.

She points to Willow Glen, where there are many different stores side-by-side, saying that configuration attracts browsers and business.

Located next to the Towne Theatre, For Your Journey offered retail and resources. Gifts such as jewelry, candles and books were sold in the front, with an area for yoga classes and a place for a women's group, poetry readings and other events in the back.

Lopez plans to continue offering yoga classes, but on a private or semi-private basis. She will still be on The Alameda, moving to a space in the same building as the South Bay Men's Group.

The Indian Motorcycle store at 830 The Alameda has always been more a destination than an impulse business, but that hasn't enabled it to survive.

"Business has been horrible for the

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Rose Garden, Shasta Hanchett, College Park, Garden Alameda, San Carlos, The Alameda, St. Leo's and Santana Row



Photograph by Vicki Thompson

Battle Site: Kirk Vartan, outside the former UC agricultural research and education center, is one of the members of the community rallying to preserve the acreage as open space used for agricultural and environmental education and programs.

Fate of the former UC agricultural station rests in hands of Santa Clara City Council

Open space proponents fight SummerHill's plans for building single-family homes

By MARY GOTTSCHALK

The 17 acres of empty land along Winchester Boulevard across from Westfield Valley Fair and two blocks from Santana Row are in the middle of a tug-of-war.

On one side are developers, including SummerHill Homes and the city of Santa Clara, who see it as a site for as many as 275 new homes.

On the other side is a group of people who want it to remain open space, used for agricultural and environmental education and programs.

The land itself isn't much to look at today—weeds and dirt surrounded by a cyclone fence. However, it has a rich history. (See sidebar.)

From the late 1920s through 2002, it was an agricultural research and education center, known to most people as BAREC, an acronym for its formal name University of California Bay Area Research and Extension Center.

UC, which owned the property, deeded it to the state in 1999, ending operations there in January 2003.

Located between the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara and owned by the state,

the property will have its fate decided by the Santa Clara City Council. The council has to approve rezoning the land from its present agricultural status before development can proceed.

Santa Clara Mayor Patricia Mahan says that while she philosophically supports open space, when it comes to the BAREC site, "there's no practical way for that to happen."

"We've conceptually approved the development plans," she says. "It's not our land. It's the state's land and they voted to sell it."

Kathryn Mathewson, an activist and founder of SaveBAREC, believes the land can still be saved and, along with other

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Cover Story: Last-ditch effort to preserve space continues



Surrounded: This planning department aerial photograph demonstrates that the former agricultural station stands as an island in a sea of development.

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activists, is doing all she can to make that happen.

Since BAREC's closure, Mathewson has been organizing meetings in the Rose Garden and Santa Clara areas to discuss strategy at least once a month and frequently more often. In addition to a core group of 10 volunteers, she says it has an active mailing list of more than 2,000 supporters.

The www.savebarec.org website is exhaustive on the subject.

Mathewson and other development opponents are both angry and frustrated that their efforts have been ignored by the state.

"Basically we're trying to save our heritage and give us botanical gardens and agricultural land," Mathewson says.

In June, BAREC's supporters advanced the proposal of a nonprofit group called Valley Initiative for Values in Agriculture to purchase the land at the agricultural land value rate of \$10,000 an acre.

That offer was rejected by the state, which in March 2003 had given Summer-Hill Homes the nod to build 110 single-family homes on 10 acres. In July 2003, the Santa Clara City Council voted to spend redevelopment money to buy six acres to build 165 units for low-income senior housing.

Santa Clara wants the remaining acre to become a park.

Mathewson points out that before either of those decisions was made, Santa Clara's planning commission had voted unanimously to keep the entire parcel as open space.

That vote, in January 2003, was totally ignored by the council, Mathewson says.

Although the decisions to develop were made in 2003, the issue of BAREC remained dormant until recently, when Santa Clara started the draft environmental report process.

A public meeting was held on Oct. 3 where input was solicited on what should be included in the EIR.

Some 30 people showed up at the afternoon meeting to ask that the report address such issues as traffic, street parking, pedestrian safety, water and soil contamination, air quality, radon gas and other issues.

Opponents of development pointed out that the development would further stress the nearby intersection of Winchester and Stevens Creek boulevards. Currently, it can take multiple light changes to clear the intersection and traffic worsens during holiday shopping periods and when there are special events at Santana Row.

Opponents are also concerned about contamination of the soil and water from the years of experimental agricultural chemical use there.

During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, aerial spraying occurred regularly. Nearby residents who have developed cancer wonder if there is a direct connection between the spraying and their health problems.

Mathewson says records of the chemi-

BAREC property has a long and rich history

By MARY GOTTSCHALK

However forlorn it looks today, the 17 acres along Winchester Boulevard across from Westfield Valley Fair have a fascinating history dating back two centuries.

The land, like so much of Santa Clara Valley, was initially farmland, according to historian Sharon McCray's extensive research.

In 1886, the California Home for the Care and Training of the Feeble Minded was established there. In those less enlightened times, the term "feeble minded" was used to cover many disabilities, including deaf and blind children, as well as those with developmental disabilities such as autism.

During the three years the facility was at the site, it served a population that grew to 110 children.

Dr. Antrim Edgar Osborne served as superintendent and was known for his innovative programs with the children, using music and marching.

The home closed in 1889, and the children were moved to what is now known as the Sonoma Developmental Center in Sonoma.

Osborne moved as well, remaining as superintendent until 1901.

Returning to Santa Clara County after the turn of the century, Osborne established a new home for children called Osborne Hall. Eventually he relocated the home to the Winchester property, which he still owned. That grew into a hospital that could accommodate 200 patients, which he also named Osborne Hall.

Osborne's practice expanded to include the elderly as well as children, but

his interests turned to politics. After election to the state Senate, Osborne stopped operating the hospital.

In 1920, 23 women refugees from the Civil War lost their home in the Evergreen area of San Jose to fire. That home was established in 1889 to care for the widows, mothers, daughters and sisters of slain Union soldiers considered dependents of the state.

After the fire, Osborne offered to sell his six-building hospital and land on Winchester to the state for a new home for the women.

The state paid \$55,000 for the hall and 18 acres, moving the women there in 1921.

In 1954 the state stopped operating the facility and started leasing it out, with the understanding that the women could remain there. Over the years more than 400 women lived at or were served by the facility.

In 1966, the last woman resident died. Eva Simpkins, then 73, had lived in the facility since 1911, when she was admitted with polio.

While the women were living on the property, 13 acres of it was being used by the University of California as an agricultural station.

The formal title of University of California Bay Area Research and Extension Center was soon shortened to its initials—BAREC.

Over the 80 years it operated, BAREC was the site of numerous experiments and innovative research with fruits, vegetables, trees and flowers.

Most of the strawberries grown in California's Central Coast area today can

trace their origins back to BAREC.

The center also did research on oak root fungus, Dutch elm disease, walnut blight and other soil and plant diseases. They experimented with using tree trimmings for mulch rather than simply burning them and in the early 1980s pioneered low-water landscaping.

BAREC's compost research led to the city of San Jose's creation of the Green Waste program, which now serves as a national model for other cities.

BAREC also served as the first home for the Master Gardeners program where volunteers did research and helped the general public with questions about home gardening.

BAREC welcomed numerous school groups as well as members of the public who would flock to the field days where volunteers offered tastings of the various types of tomatoes, peppers and other things they were growing experimentally there.

BAREC closed its doors in January 2003 and the fate of the property has been at issue since.

UC, which by then had taken over ownership of the property, deeded it back to the state in 1999 in expectation that its Cooperative Extension budget would receive an additional \$2 million every year thereafter. Thus far, just \$600,000 has been transferred into the budget, but the fate of the land is no longer in UC's hands.

Located between the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara and owned by the state, the actual fate of the property is still undecided with preservationists who want to see it remain open space on one side and developers who want to build housing on the other.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

calls used were thrown away, and her group has been collecting what information it can from notes taken by people who volunteered there over the years.

"They've said there is no history on this land, but they threw out the history. There was a library on the property with all that information and it's gone," she says.

If a proper cleanup isn't done, Mathewson says research by the Environmental Protection Agency shows it's possible for chemicals to come up through home foundations and inside.

It was at the Oct. 3 meeting that development opponents learned that the property was no longer referred to as BAREC, but had been renamed Santa Clara Gardens Project.

To Mathewson and others, it's an obvious move to confuse the public.

Art Henriques, planning manager for the city, says the name was proposed by the Santa Clara Methodist Retirement Foundation, which hopes to operate the senior housing development.

"Normally, when applicants come in with projects they give it the name they want it to be, not the name it had," Henriques says.

"The intent is not to confuse people. Staff is aware of the historical BAREC name and comments that come in with just BAREC are forwarded to the appropriate departments," Henriques says.

At the same meeting, city staff said the cost for the EIR cost was expected to be about \$1 million and was being paid for by SummerHill.

Joe Head, president and CEO of SummerHill, says that is inaccurate and the EIR cost is being paid by the state.

"Cities require the owner to pay for the EIR," Head points out.

While his company is the high bidder on 10 of the acres, he says escrow won't close until building permits are issued, so SummerHill does not now own it.

If permits are issued, Head says the company plans to build homes ranging from 1,700 to 2,600 square feet that would sell in today's market for \$800,000 and up.

Over the past 29 years, SummerHill has completed more than 40 developments in the Bay Area, representing more than 4,000 single family homes, condominiums, townhomes and apartments.

Head is optimistic that this project will be approved.

"There's been a number of hearings and public discussions, both formal and informal, over the year-and-a-half we've been processing," Head says.

"It's really a judgement that the city council in Santa Clara will make of what is the best use of that land. So far the city council has been clear they want to see low-income housing for seniors and they're very comfortable with the residential proposal we've made," he says.

"The people proposing that it remain open space have had a significant amount of time to make their case and they haven't been very persuasive," Head says.

Mathewson disagrees. "There are lots of steps to take to keep it open space," she says.

"We're making them be thorough with the EIR and in this thoroughness they'll find a lot of reasons why this land should not be developed."

Once the draft EIR is completed, which is expected to be in the spring, there will be a 45-day comment period and then a final



Photograph by Vicki Thompson

Command Post: Landscape designer Kathryn Mathewson, a Rose Garden resident, has been an outspoken critic of Santa Clara's plans to rezone the BAREC property for housing. The old greenhouses at the agricultural station are visible in the background as she stands atop a parking structure at Westgate Valley Fair.



Photograph by George Hamma

Parting Shot: Prior to its closing, BAREC was the site of a gathering of neighbors and other interested parties.



Photograph by George Hamma

Past Perfect: This photograph of one of BAREC's gardens was shot before the former agricultural station closed.

EIR will be issued. Following that will be additional public hearings.

Mathewson and others hope the city council will vote to keep the zoning agricultural, reopening the possibility of it becoming a park.

If the council does vote to change the zoning for development, Mathewson predicts it will trigger a voter referendum to overturn that decision and keep it open space.