



7/17/02

EAST PALO ALTO

'First source' hiring policy an apparent success

*Shopping center employs 42 percent
East Palo Alto residents*

by Don Kazak

When East Palo Alto began its redevelopment projects several years ago, one of the goals was to create jobs for the city's residents.

That part seems to be working, according to statistics provided by the city.

Of the 450 people employed at the half-dozen stores and restaurants at the Ravenswood 101 Retail Center, 42 percent are city residents.

The shopping center will get a big addition next year when the large IKEA store opens. That store alone will more than double the workforce at the shopping center, adding 550 workers.

Ricardo Noguera, the city's redevelopment division manager, said the redevelopment projects are pretty much on track. Noguera made his report last week at the first of what will be quarterly meetings to reach out to city residents to bring them up to date on redevelopment activity.

Noguera's list of projects was long, a sign that East Palo Alto's tight budgets and lack of sales-tax revenue may soon be things of the past.

Foundation work has begun for the IKEA store. Across town, construction of a new Four Seasons Hotel will also be under way soon.

IKEA and the hotel are the two economic engines city officials are counting on to expand the city's coffers.

Two office projects are also in the works. One is University Palms (which has retail, too) at University Avenue and Donohoe Street, just adjacent to the shopping center. The other is University Place, adjacent to the University Circle project on the west side of the freeway.

But with the slow economy these days and a glut of office space open in Palo Alto, Noguera said he didn't know if either of the two

office projects will be delayed once they win approvals.

In addition, an environmental review will start soon for the Ravenswood Industrial Area, which extends roughly along Bay Road out to near Cooley landing, but also extends to University Avenue and the vacant "four corners" site which was home to a shopping center and grocery store decades ago.

Finding another grocery store to move into town is still one of the city's highest economic priorities, with various sites being mentioned as possibilities. To that end, the city formed a supermarket task force back in February to woo a grocery store to town.

The supermarket task force is looking at sites, doing market studies, and will eventually talk directly to grocery store companies and developers about building a store in the city.

The city also has a goal of involving local businesses, including building contractors, in projects whenever possible. Noguera said IKEA held a bidders conference in May for local businesses, with 25 business representatives attending. So far, two local companies have been hired by IKEA, he said.

Noguera said the South County Community Health Clinic, which opened last year in temporary buildings on Bay Road, will have a new health clinic within five years.

With plenty of projects to work on, "our biggest challenge right now is the economy," Noguera said. ■

E-mail Don Kazak at dkazak@paweekly.com