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Menlo Park and Palo Alto

Neighboring cities discuss East Palo Alto

By Carol Watson
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City council members from Menlo Park and Palo Alto got together Wednesday — and discussed East Palo Alto.

The proposed redevelopment of East Palo Alto's University Centre area was one of several topics of mutual concern reviewed by the two city councils during a joint meeting.

The draft environmental impact report on redevelopment of the area will be completed by the end

of August or the beginning of September, and both cities want a chance to offer their opinions on it.

Palo Alto Mayor Jack Sutorius said he was concerned by the way in which East Palo Alto viewed the EIR, which addresses land use of the general area rather than a specific project.

Thus, it would be possible for East Palo Alto to approve proposals by declaration of no negative impact if the proposal fits within the limits of the first redevelopment EIR.

That would potentially allow the 1.2-million-square-foot development — which includes two 18-story office towers, a hotel, shops and a 10-screen movie theater — to slip into acceptance without undergoing an additional environmental impact report.

"The final action on the EIR establishes a parameter for whatever proposal comes through," Sutorius said. "At least at this juncture we don't believe that's a solid foundation."

Sutorius said the Palo Alto City Council had expressed displeasure

at the process in a formal letter to East Palo Alto.

But while the Palo Alto City Council has been quite vocal in its concerns about the proposed redevelopment, the Menlo Park City Council has never officially discussed it.

"Rather than having everyone jump on this little town, I'm letting you lead the way," Menlo Park City Councilwoman Jan La Fetra told members of the Palo Alto City Council.

"We're sitting back and watching."

Menlo Park Mayor Calvin Jones said the council was waiting to see if "there was something to react to" before reacting.

La Fetra said that some residents were very concerned about how the traffic generated by University Circle would impact Menlo Park.

Members of both city councils said they would like to include the mayor of East Palo Alto in future discussions.

In other issues, Jones reviewed the withdrawal by Westin Hotel & Resorts of its proposal to build a

387-room hotel in Menlo Park.

He said the chain's three main reasons were lack of community support, traffic in the Sand Hill corridor and problems with the city's comprehensive plan.

"It appears there are some deficiencies in our comprehensive plan," he said.

"I expect they had concerns that they would get caught up in this problem."

Jones said that it was "pretty much up to Westin" at this point whether they would pursue the project.