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Meeting attendees oppose development of golf resort

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By Shannon Snow
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

October 13, 2005

RANCHO PENASQUITOS – What should change at the Doubletree Hotel and Golf Resort?

For about 70 people who attended a workshop about the issue, the answer was simple: nothing.

The Tuesday night meeting at the hotel was a chance for residents to express their views about possible redevelopment of the 127-acre resort.

The overwhelming consensus, however, was the Doubletree should stay as it is. Residents said they didn't want housing units, a shopping center or a town square on the property.

"The bottom line here is that we're looking not to increase density for living or commercial purposes. Traffic will be unbearable if it becomes a complex," resident Ken Towers said, eliciting a loud "yeah!" from the audience.

The one thing those at the meeting wanted more of was chairs. The turnout was three times what the organizers expected. People stood at the back and some sat on the floor of the Doubletree's Riviera Room.

The meeting was the first of three arranged by Windstar Communities and EDAW, consulting firms hired by Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers of Hartford, Conn., which owns the Doubletree property. It was intended to assess the community's views about the resort.

The consultants said they sent 1,200 invitations to those living north of the Doubletree and south of Camino Del Norte about Tuesday night's meeting, although some attendees came from outside that area.

The 174-room hotel, on the west side of Interstate 15 north of Carmel Mountain Road, was last renovated in 1999. Assessing the resort's value to the community was part of the owner's regular review of the property, Windstar's Darrell Gary told those at the meeting.

Moderators conducted an electronic poll of 50 attendees. Multiple-



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choice questions were projected on a screen, and people voted using calculator-sized clickers.

One of the most contentious questions was, "Which type of homes does the community need most?" It was met with groans as "single family, town house, time share and low income" flashed on the screen.

"None of the above!" someone shouted. After more than half of those who could vote refused, a hand vote confirmed that "none of the above" was the preferred response.

In other results, 26 percent of those voting said the Doubletree golf course was the community's most important amenity; followed by schools, 18 percent; and parks, 16 percent. Traffic was pegged as the biggest challenge facing the neighborhood by 62 percent of those voting.

In addition to congestion, many residents were concerned about how changes to the Doubletree would affect property values and quality of life.

"When you live by a golf course, that's an asset," 11-year resident Carla Harris said. "If we lose that, it affects our property values."

Organizers said the event was successful because of the strong turnout.

"The goal was to have a meaningful dialogue," moderator Ken Ryan of EDAW said.

Joost Bende, chairman of the Rancho Peñasquitos Planning Board, and several board members also attended the meeting.

"It was a good meeting, very respectful and open. We learned a lot about how this section of the community feels," Bende said.

But some residents worried that their message to the Doubletree owners would be misinterpreted or fall on deaf ears.

"I'm distrustful because I've seen it used as a marketing ploy in other places," said Robert Simmons, who moved from Cleveland a year ago.

The next workshop will be at 6 p.m. Wednesday in the hotel's Sandpiper Room. It is intended for people who live south of Diablo Way, east of Peñasquitos Drive and north of Carmel Mountain Road.

A third meeting – for residents west and southwest of Peñasquitos Drive, west of Interstate 15 and north of Ted Williams Parkway – is scheduled for 6 p.m. Nov. 9 at the same location.

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