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Doubletree resort is gauging community response to plans

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By Booyeon Lee
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RANCHO PENASQUITOS – The landowner of the Doubletree Golf Resort is testing community reaction to possible changes at the aging hotel. They range from renovating it to tearing it down and replacing the 127-acre resort and golf course with housing and commercial development.

In a series of focus groups last week, about 30 residents were shown several alternative development ideas that included clusters of homes in the center of the resort property, which is along the west side of Interstate 15 and north of Carmel Mountain Road.

Other renderings showed apartments, town houses and commercial and office buildings, said residents who attended the sessions.

Although no plans have been submitted to the city, word of the presentation has spread quickly. Some residents are alarmed, particularly because a 600-unit apartment complex is proposed just south of the resort.

"The developers are doing their homework, but they're scaring a lot of people," said Joost Bende, chairman of the Rancho Peñasquitos Planning Board.

"We have to stay calm, cool and collected, and keep our ears open so that whatever is planned there matches the requirement of the community plan."

This week, Councilman Scott Peters' office fielded a dozen phone calls and the Planning Board got 15 e-mails about possible development of the resort property.

On Monday, residents launched a Web site, at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PQdevelopment>, to spread the word about it.

No plans to tear down the 30-year-old golf resort are in the works, said Diane Gaynor, a consultant to San Diego-based Windstar Communities. Windstar was hired by Hartford, Conn.-based Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers, which owns the Doubletree land, to



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gauge community feelings about the resort, Gaynor said. Cornerstone is a subsidiary of Massachusetts Mutual Insurance Co. in Springfield, Mass.

"It's a blank slate," Gaynor said. "The landowners are asking, 'Do we stay, upgrade, or move away?' Normally, you get these answers in a private market research. In this case, the doors are wide open. They're going to the community."

In a news release issued yesterday, Windstar announced its plan to schedule a series of public workshops about the resort, and to create a telephone hotline in the next few months.

The company is considering residents' feedback from focus group sessions, Gaynor said. Participants said they would like to see a resort-style senior community with a golf course on the Doubletree property, a community center and a retail plaza with boutique shops, parks and upscale restaurants, according to the release.

Pam Logeman, whose home overlooks the golf course, said those in the focus group she attended last week were adamant against more apartments in the neighborhood. She said she is worried about increased traffic on Peñasquitos Drive, which borders the golf course and is the only way out of her neighborhood to Interstate 15.

Logeman, whose children attend Rolling Hills Elementary School, said any more apartments in the area would overcrowd the school.

Logeman said she and her neighbors are also concerned about 600 apartments proposed near the Doubletree, on a 30.7-acre parcel bordered by Carmel Mountain Road and Cuca and Gerana streets.

the property owner was given a preliminary OK in February by the community planning board and the city's Planning Commission for the so-called Cresta Bella project.

California Properties Leisure Life, the San Diego-based company that owns the land, wants to tear down San Diego Leisure Life Village, 248 existing apartments on the parcel. More than half are low-income units in the federal Section 8 rental-subsidy program. The federal contract expires next spring.

None of the residents of the complex would be displaced, said Ken Lounsbery, an Escondido-based attorney who represents the company.

Under the proposal, which will be presented to the planning board in the fall, three clusters of two-story apartments would be built on the parcel. They would include about 70 percent market-rate and about 30 percent low-to moderate-income apartments, Lounsbery said.

If the city grants California Properties' request to increase the housing density on the land by amending the city's General Plan, it could build as many as 1,004 apartments. But Lounsbery said the latest proposal calls for no more than 600.

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California Properties also owns 332 apartments, called Peñasquitos Village, on the other side of Carmel Mountain Road. About 200 are federal low-income units under a contract that expires in eight years. Residents are concerned Peñasquitos Village could also be redeveloped when that contract ends.

"We're a tight-knit family community," Logeman said. "We could have thousands more people living on that intersection soon. Can our roads and schools handle all these changes?"

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