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## Residents give thumbs down to Doubletree's redevelopment plan

By Jose A Lopez

June 7, 2007

After looking at pictures showing trails and tree-hidden houses instead of sand traps and putting greens, most of the Rancho Penasquitos residents who got a first look at plans to redevelop the Doubletree Golf Resort seemed to speak with a unified voice Wednesday evening.



*Rancho Penasquitos residents listen to plans Wednesday evening that would call for replacing the Doubletree resort with houses, a retail center and parks.*

That voice — to borrow a golfing term — appeared to say property-owner Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers has hit a bunker.

Most in the standing-room only crowd gave the proposal a chilly reception.

Increased traffic, loss of the golf course and an impact to schools, traffic and property values were some of the main issues opponents raised.

Before a packed ballroom at the Doubletree, representatives from Cornerstone showed how 200 homes, a centralized hotel, an airy "lifestyle" retail center and a community center might fit in the 127 acres.

The presentation took place at the June meeting of the Rancho Penasquitos Planning Board.

Cornerstone and its consultants will take the public's reaction into account and decide within a month if they are going to ask for a change to the community plan, the main document that governs development.

That would be the first step in a long process, which would include the advisory board, the planning commission and the city council.

Cornerstone's plan calls for turning 42 percent of the land — or 53.5 acres — into a development of single family homes. Nearly an identical amount, 52 acres, would be turned into parks, which would be maintained by homeowners association fees from the new properties. The hotel and the community center would each sit on 5 acres.

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Mark Higgins, western regional director for Cornerstone, said the golf course is an underperforming property for the Hartford, Conn.,-based company, whose \$8 billion holdings include \$2.5 billion in hotels.

"We don't think it's sustainable," Higgins said, noting that Cornerstone has put about \$8 million into the resort during the last five years.

He said that given the limited space and competition from other larger courses, Cornerstone would not be able to make the course competitive.

"It's obvious that the golf course, for those of you who play golf, is a little short," Higgins said.

Many residents who spoke cited the course as the main reason they moved to the area, and suggested restructuring fees, offering time-shares and other solutions to keep the course.

Ken Ryan of the KTG Group — Cornerstone's consultant — said there is only one other option to redevelopment.

"(The golf course) is certainly going to be sold if we don't move forward," Ryan said.

He added that in 2004, before taking a look at redevelopment, Cornerstone considered selling the property. Its top bid came from a land speculator, Ryan said.

Joost Bende, the board's vice chairman, said moving forward residents will have to come to their own conclusion on what "open space" means.

"The golf course is 120 acres of open space, but it's private — you have to pay to play," he said. "The 52 acres (in the Cornerstone proposal) is public open space."

Some members of the public questioned the access the community would have to open spaces paid for exclusively by new homeowners.

"This conceptual plan feels like a private park for the owners of the development," Dave Heffron said, adding that the owners of the new, high-end homes could just as well gate the area "and keep out us riffraff."

Architect and resident Mark Vigori said that because the land is sloped, most of the 52 acres in the plan will not be open space.

"A lot of people like their views, whether you're allowed in the golf course or not," he added. "If you move to sell it, then you sell it, that's not my business. But the open space has to remain open space."

For access, developers would add an entrance and exit on Carmel Mountain Road, widen Penasquitos and add a traffic signal at Cuca Street and Penasquitos Drive.

Ryan said area streets would retain their level of service, though some questioned whether those changes would turn the area roads

into a northern version of the heavily congested Mira Mesa Boulevard.

The unveiling of the plans was at the end of a two-year process during which Cornerstone met with members of the community in small focus groups to gather information.

Charles Sellers, the board's chairman, noted that the work Cornerstone has done before taking out papers with the city — the first step to initiate a redevelopment project — is not typical or required.

One resident said her views were slightly changed after the presentation, though she added that she remains opposed to any construction without added improvements to the area that will ensure that roads, schools and sewer systems are not overburdened.

Resident Deborah Russell said she liked the plans for the community center, and that she thought the impact of 200 homes would not be as great as other alternatives, or as to another redevelopment proposal expected in the area.

"If this doesn't happen, it'll go to a developer," she said. "A speculator could get it and build more than 200 homes."