

# THOUSAND OAKS Acorn

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## Mixed use passes muster

■ Apartment, retail  
project approved

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Work could begin as soon as this summer on a first-of-its-kind development in the city.

On Monday, the Thousand Oaks Planning Commission voted 3-1 in favor of a request to build a three-story mix of residential and retail less than a quarter-mile from the Civic Arts Plaza.

Applicant Vince Daly of Daly Group Inc. said after the Feb. 13 hearing that he would waste no time in starting construction at the site, a 5-acre property on Thousand Oaks Boulevard formerly home to Lupe's Mexican Restaurant.

"We like to move fast," Daly said. "Next we go into the construction drawings phase, which can take from three to six months, then we should start construction. Hopefully we'll build the project in a year from there."

Daly's plan calls for the construction of 36 market-rate apartments and 4,980 square feet of commercial space, space city leaders hope will attract both a restaurant and a cafe/bistro. The design also includes a courtyard and meandering path for use by future tenants and the public.

The work as approved by the planning commission allows for the removal of 16 coast live oak trees, four that will be cut down and 12 that will be transplanted elsewhere. Four landmark trees, protected due to their species and size, will also be removed.

Of the four public speakers who voiced opposition to the proposal, three were members of a local organization dedicated to

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## Mixed use

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the protection and conservation of native oak and landmark trees.

"I'm not really sure the community is ready for the urbanization of Thousand Oaks Boulevard," said Marilyn Carpenter, a 54-year T.O. resident and one-time planning commissioner. "There was a period of time when we wouldn't touch a property if it had an oak on it. We're talking about significant impact on oaks."

But the majority of speakers Monday were in support of the development, which some pointed out would set the standard for all future mixed-use applications in

the city.

"This project, that will effectively be the gateway into the civic center to the west, fits perfectly into the vision our City Council is working toward creating," said Shawn Moradian, president of the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Association, a group that represents the interests of property owners along the boulevard. "Mr. Daly and his associates are local members of our community and have taken the time, care and diligence to study the specific plan to ensure their project complies with the vision and intent of the boulevard (plan)."

Daly, who lives in Thousand Oaks, noted his company will not only be developer and contractor on the project but will retain ownership after it is built. He described

the group as a collection of "local guys."

"There's a sense of pride for us. We live here," he said. "We want to have a cup of coffee there. We want people to say how cool it is when it's done."

Daly admitted during the public hearing that when his colleagues first showed him the historic property, he didn't think it could be developed. In addition to being home to scores of protected trees, the site is bisected by an underground flood control channel and nearly three acres of the property has a 25 percent or greater slope.

Figuring out how to make the project economically viable and meet the city's requirements was a bit of a Rubik's Cube-type puzzle, said Daly, who has built projects throughout the Southland, including Ventura and Oxnard, but never before in Thousand Oaks.

Commissioner Doug Nickles commended the applicant for its willingness to meet the high bar set by city planners.

"All the things that need to be tweaked in order to make this work have been addressed," he said. "It fits the plan and I think the City Council would agree if they were here that, yes, this works, this is

what we have in mind."

### Breaking ranks

The planning commission's biggest vote in recent memory was decided by four votes after Commissioner Jeff Alexander stepped down a few days prior to the meeting. Alexander told the *Acorn* his wife recently underwent serious back surgery and he needed to be available to care for her during her recovery.

After commissioners Nickles, Andrew Pletcher and Sharon McMahan all stated their support for the proposal, current board chair David Newman read from a prepared statement detailing his objections to the project—and the development of Thousand Oaks Boulevard in general.

"I do not agree there is a need to build up and urbanize Thousand Oaks," he said at one point.

The appointee of Councilmember Claudia Bill-de la Peña, Newman said the proposal was against the city's architectural guidelines, which encourage projects that enhance the rural character of the community.

"It can either look like a European city or maintain a semi-rural character," he said. "You can't do both and comply with existing city policy."

Citing a 2015 resident attitude survey, the city's most recent, New-

man said only 7 percent of responding residents said the city needs more economic development.

"This is not compatible with the wishes of the majority of T.O. residents," he said. "In other words, we're being asked to solve a problem that doesn't exist here."

Not noted by Newman is 41 percent of responders to the same survey said they would support mixed use development assuming T.O. Boulevard is redeveloped.

Newman finished by saying the project would increase traffic on the boulevard without addressing the city's need for affordable and senior housing.

"(The project) is good for developers, it's good for property owners along the boulevard. For the rest of Thousand Oaks who didn't want and didn't ask for the urbanization of our town, it's not as good an idea as currently designed," he said. "I would be able to support this in a smaller form factor or with more senior housing or more assisted living, but as currently configured, as nice a design as I think this is, I'm not able to support this."

Moradian said after the meeting that he felt like Newman didn't give the developer a fair shake.

"He had a prepared list of objections he was reading from. He had his mind made up before the hearing took place," Moradian said.