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New draft EIR of Deer Creek nearly done

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ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

Published: Friday, July 29, 2011 at 10:30 a.m.

A consulting firm is nearing completion of a new draft environmental impact report on the proposed Deer Creek Village shopping center, and the City Council soon could be asked to decide whether or not the controversial project moves forward.

"WRA Consulting Firm of San Rafael is working with the city on the report, and is focusing mainly on traffic, air quality and greenhouse gas issues," said Heather Hines, the city's deputy planning manager. "Right now, we are working on responses to comments that have been made about the report.

"I hope that we will see a draft in the next couple weeks."

Once the EIR is completed, the next steps are for it to be reviewed by the Planning Commission, City Council and Site Plan and Architectural Review Committee.

"We have at least three public hearings ahead of us," Hines said.

Developers boast that the project would be unique and financially rewarding to Petaluma. It would be anchored by Lowe's, and also include another large store as well as smaller home improvement and boutique stores, restaurants, a fitness center and exercise trails and stations.

"It will be a very unique, and will fill a significant void in Petaluma," said Marko Mliktonin, a public relations spokesperson for Merlone Geier, the development company.

Developers claim that the shopping center would bring 300 temporary construction jobs to Petaluma during the building process, and 500 permanent jobs. They estimate that it would generate \$1 million annually in sales tax and property tax revenue, as well as pay \$5 million in traffic impact fees toward the Rainier project and \$4 million in other fees.

An EIR for the project was released in 2011, but was criticized by environmentalists, including members of the Petaluma Neighborhoods Association, for not containing sufficient analyses of traffic and air quality and not being consistent with Petaluma's 2008 General Plan.

After more than four hours of public comment and discussion, the City Council decided to have staff work on a final version of the environmental impact report.

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