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Group appeals city's OK of Deer Creek Village project

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Attorneys for the Petaluma Neighborhood Association have appealed the city's approval of the Friedman's-anchored Deer Creek Village shopping center, requesting that the City Council reverse the Planning Commission's recent approval of the design review for the development and also asking that the environmental review for the project be revised and recirculated.

The Petaluma Neighborhood Association is a community group that has long raised concerns about the impacts of large-scale development in Petaluma, particularly "big box" development. In 2010, the association joined other groups in a lawsuit challenging the city's approval of the Target-based East Washington Place shopping center, which led to a \$100,000 settlement later that year.

The agreement called for Regency Centers, developer of the Target center, to pay the Petaluma Community Coalition \$100,000 in exchange for promises the coalition would no longer oppose the development.

Attorneys for the group previously sent letters questioning the legality of Deer Creek's draft and final environmental impact reports, calling the project incompatible with the city's General Plan, and in the six-page appeal filed to the city on Tuesday, they outlined some of the same concerns.

A primary concern was over traffic, particularly whether or not the Rainier Crosstown Connector, which is designed to ease traffic in the area, will be built.

Since redevelopment agencies were dissolved earlier this year, throwing some funding for Rainier into question, some have questioned whether Rainier will be built in time to provide effective traffic relief for the Deer Creek project. City staff meanwhile, has contended that it's pursuing alternate means to find funding for Rainier.

The appeal also claims, among other things, that the FEIR omitted analyses of various impacts and didn't properly analyze others, such as those on transportation, air quality and the local environment.

Marko Mlikotin, a spokesman for Merlone Geier Partners, the developer of the proposed Friedman's project, issued a statement reacting to the appeal Tuesday afternoon, expressing concerns that a lawsuit could follow the appeal, delaying or stopping the project.

"Over a four-year period, the impacts of the Deer Creek Village shopping center have been thoroughly considered by the city, independent consultants and by neighbors who have attended dozens of community meetings," Mlikotin wrote. "We are confident that the City Council will reaffirm its past position that the

Friedman's shopping center was adequately studied and the economic benefits of 800 jobs can't be ignored.”

City staff must now review the appeal and provide a report for the City Council to consider.

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