

■ MENLO PARK: HIGHWAY 101-MARSH ROAD EXIT MIXED-USE PROJECT

Developer: Poll shows residents back plan

City leaders say survey of \$300 million hotel, office project won't affect their vote

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The developer proposing a \$300 million hotel and office project near the Highway 101-Marsh Road exit has released poll results he says show Menlo Park residents support the controversial plan.

But city leaders challenged some of the questions asked by pollsters San Mateo-based developer David Bohannon commissioned and said the survey wouldn't affect their vote on the project later this year.

Four years ago Bohannon proposed a development that has evolved into a 230-room Marriott hotel, three eight-story office buildings and a 76,000-square-foot health club. Seven light industrial office buildings would be demolished to make room for the 16-acre project between U.S. Highway 101 and Bayfront Expressway just off Marsh Road. The council will discuss the city's development agreement with Bohannon at its April 14 meeting.

Bohannon hired San Mateo-based Godbe Research to survey 400 residents over the last few months. Pollsters gave residents some information about the project, such as jobs to be created and potential traffic to be generated, then asked them to gauge the importance of that information.

At the end of the questionnaire pollsters asked respondents whether they would support the development, and nearly two-thirds indicated they would, said Godbe Research President Bryan Godbe. One-fourth of respondents opposed the project while 11 percent were undecided, he said.

Residents responded favorably when told the project would create \$1.6 million in additional revenue for the city and produce 1,900 construction jobs and a net of 2,300 permanent jobs. Residents did express concern, however, that many of the jobs would be low-wage hospitality positions, Godbe said.

"I think there's no question that the times we are in are affecting the way people feel about economic development, and this certainly is economic development," Bohannon said.

But Mayor Heyward Robinson and Vice Mayor Richard Cline, who were also briefed on the poll results, said Bohannon's report will have little, if any, effect on whether they ultimately approve the project.

"As far as I'm concerned nothing's really changed," Robinson said. "We'll be scrutinizing — and staff is scrutinizing — the potential impacts."

They also took issue with the wording

of some of the poll questions, saying suggested the city had intentionally tried to slow down the project.

"It's good to have more data, but it's one piece of a large puzzle of consideration," Cline said. "I'll take it for what it is."

Robinson also objected to the poll suggestion that the Menlo Park development would produce about \$2 million for local public schools, without mentioning the project would actually lie in the boundaries of Redwood City's school districts.

"You're sitting there going, 'Wow, wouldn't this be great to have this money available to Ravenswood School District in particular, which is really in need of money help,' but no, it wouldn't help," Robinson said.

Despite city leaders' response Bohannon said he was "emboldened and encouraged" by the polling results, which he provided to council members and City Manager Glen Rojas. He said he also planned to hold community meetings on the proposal.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the level of support," Bohannon said.

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