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## North Chico subdivision to go before Planning Commission

By JENN KLEIN - Staff Writer  
Article Launched: 05/16/2007 12:00:00 AM PDT

A development in the works for 10 years is now approaching the decision stage.

The large development proposed for north Chico by Epick Homes will go before the Chico Planning Commission Thursday. The development, called Mountain Vista/Sycamore Glen, will add up to 679 residences to a 178-site mostly north of Eaton Road, between Ceanothus and Floral avenues.

Plans for the site — which is surrounded by development on three sides — call for 670 residences — which includes 409 single-family homes — about two acres of commercial development, and a 56-acre preserve.

Pete Giampaoli of Epick Homes said the group bought the property around 10 years ago and has been working with various agencies — including city staff, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the regional water quality board, and PG&E — to come up with a plan for the wetlands on the site.

A tentative plan approved in the '70s would have allowed 1,481 units on the site. But Giampaoli said the recognition of wetlands on the site in the '90s meant plans had to change. Around 50 percent of the original project is now gone, he said.

Epick Homes current plans call for one-third of the property and half of



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the wetlands on the site to be left in a preserve as open space.

According to a staff report by senior planner Bob Summerville, the project needs an amendment and rezone to the Chico General Plan to create a mix of housing types and a mixed-use neighborhood core.

Biologist and environmental consultant Kevin Derby said because the wetlands on the site — near Pleasant Valley High School — are somewhat out of sight, the area has become a high

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school party spot.

Derby, a senior project manager for Foothill Associates, which provides environmental consulting, landscape architecture, and planning services, said the property is also a big attraction for off-roading and has had problems with people dumping junk.



Giampaoli said Epick Homes — which bought the property some 17 years after fences once there were removed — have tried numerous ways of keeping people off the property, all of which failed. Epick Homes met with city officials, signed letters allowing the police to arrest people and made personal attempts to keep people off.

About 11½ years ago, the developers looked into putting a fence up but decided the \$50,000 to \$100,000 it would have cost was a lot of money to spend on a project that was almost ready to go, Giampaoli said.

Giampaoli said Epick has been working on how to incorporate the wetlands since 1996 and spent the bulk of the initial time trying to determine what is feasible and the best environmental solution.

Derby said it makes no sense to have to have tiny postage stamp-sized wetlands because what's needed is larger areas for animals to move.

Engineers and land planners discovered that the wetlands on the site have a watershed break that separates what will be in the preserve from the rest of the subdivision, Giampaoli said. Derby said because of that break, the storm drain water in the homes should not affect the wetlands. He said the water quality will be better and the area should be nicer place for wildlife.

Flood control will also not be an issue. It will create up to a 120-foot buffer to Sycamore Creek.

The open space will preserve about six acres of wetlands and some of the larger vernal pools in the Chico urban area.

Derby said the preserve will also have the opportunity to create vernal pools, which Epick Homes plans on doing.

"It's significantly damaged, but the potential to rehabilitate is huge," Derby said.

In addition to the wetlands already preserved on site, Epick Homes is also in the process of establishing a 400-acre conservation easement in southern Tehama County. About 80 acres of the conservation will substitute for those lost at the Chico site.

Derby said because of the high caliber of wetlands in the Tehama County site, he believes establishing and preserving that site far outweighs the benefits of preserving all the Chico site.

The land in the preserve will also connect to the existing 200-acre Foothill Park Preserve and then to Bidwell Ranch. The homes that face the preserve will form the urban edge of the city.

The homes are oriented to face the preserve to create a sense of "ownership" and to keep eyes on the land to prevent any future dumping, Giampaoli said. A bike path also follows the edge of the preserve in the plans. Also proposed is a linear park along Floral Avenue.

The project is most dense toward Eaton Road with townhouses and smaller homes.

About 70 percent of the homes are solar oriented and Epick Homes is also researching solar products that would be cost-efficient for a homeowner to maintain.

Epick Homes is also asking for a reduction in the amount of commercial the Chico General Plan requires on the site. Giampaoli said because the project is 50 percent less than it once was, and because it will be the urban edge of the city, numerous studies have shown that property would not be able to support the original 5 acres required.

The plans for the subdivision also include a variety of home exteriors. Giampaoli said with 80 different color schemes, seven different floor plans, and a variety of different materials, no two homes in the subdivision will look the same.

The General Plan amendment and rezones also need the City Council's approval.

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