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Mtn. View looks at housing, war, plans for center

By Joshua L. Kwan
Mercury News

A busy Tuesday night session took the Mountain View City Council on a tour of wide-ranging issues. It began with an update from a private developer planning to build new military housing in the city, and included a plea from residents to enact a resolution against a possible war with Iraq, as well as a vote redirecting staff attention from planning a new community center to the construction of a new senior center.

Several officials from the U.S. Army scheduled to appear at a study session just before Tuesday night's meeting never arrived to explain their development proposal. The council was informed that weather had delayed the Army officials' trip; apparently they were held up by a snowstorm at the Cajon Pass in Southern California and couldn't make their flight.

Council member Rosemary Stasek excoriated the Army in their absence, saying she has been consistently thwarted whenever she has tried to convey her concerns about the project to the Army's decision-makers.

``It's incredibly frustrating,'' Stasek said, pointing out that the Army's plans are scheduled to be finalized in April.

The council is taking a special interest in the military housing construction because part of the development will take place within city limits, at the corner of Moffett Boulevard and

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parcel of land. People living in those military units would use city resources, including its schools, Stasek said.

In addition, because of a 50-year agreement between the Army and the private developer, Clark Pinnacle, the housing units eventually could turn into a private subdivision of townhomes.

Should the Army decide it no longer needs the housing for its soldiers during the 50-year deal, Clark Pinnacle gains ownership of the project under federal law. Stasek said the city should plan now for that possibility, including how to collect from Clark Pinnacle the numerous fees that aren't enforced on federal government projects.

A group of 12 residents, at another point in the meeting, urged the council to adopt a resolution opposing the possible war in Iraq.

Mountain View environmentalist Lenny Siegel told the council that it is qualified to take a stance on the war because Mountain View has close ties to Moffett Field, a longtime base for the military. Resident Alison Hicks agreed, saying the enormous amount of money spent in the troop buildup for what she called ``an unjust and unnecessary war'' could be better used by local governments like Mountain View's.

The city should ``stand up to the federal government,'' Hicks told the council.

Two people spoke in response to the war protesters, arguing that the city council has no expertise in national security and that freedom and democracy are worth defending.

Though the council voted 3-2 against considering a resolution on a possible war with Iraq, council member Greg Perry invoked his privilege to place any item on the agenda, provided city staff members don't have to spend more than an hour working on it. The council will hear more comments from the public on March 18, and will take a vote on whether to consider adopting a resolution.

Council members Stasek, Matt Pear and Nick Galiotto voted

against considering a resolution, and Pear said the council can't possibly form sound policy without extensive research.

The council did approve, by a vote of 4-1, plans for an interim senior center while the old one is demolished because it fails to meet earthquake standards. Perry disapproved of the interim plan, which calls for the construction of temporary units that would cost the city $2.5 million.

Perry said city staff members should have studied more deeply an alternative that would allow seniors to use the first floor of the existing community center. He said the proposal could save the city some of the $2.5 million earmarked for temporary buildings that would later be torn down.

With a city budget squeezed by the poor economy, the city council's vote on Tuesday directs city staff members to focus on building a new senior center rather than a new community center.

Mayor Mike Kasperzak and council member Mary Lou Zoglin were absent Tuesday night.

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