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Thursday Edition

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Low Turnout At Caruso DEIR Meeting

By Traci Kratzer

Popularity reigned supreme at Tuesday night's Arcadia Planning Commission meeting.

A majority of the supporters from both Westfield and Caruso discussed the merits of the individual entities instead of addressing issues in the recently completed Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for The Shops at Santa Anita.

Despite the allegiance that many residents have for the two sides, the audience turnout was fairly dismal with several seats remaining unoccupied throughout the course of the meeting.

However, the bulk of those in attendance were clearly supporters of Caruso, a point that was solidified after Rick Lemmo, Caruso Affiliated's vice president of community relations, called for a show of hands from those supporting the DEIR findings and the project.



Most in the audience raised their hand when Rick Lemmo, Caruso Affiliated's vice president of community relations, asked who supports the proposed project. - Photo by Terry Miller

"My friends and I want a place that we can shop, go to dinner and hang out and still feel safe," said recent Arcadia High School graduate Kelly Mandic. "We don't feel safe at the Westfield mall."

Resident Tony Henrich echoed Mandic's sentiment by saying, "The project will bring added goodwill to the residents. It will finally give us a downtown and preserve the crown jewel that is the Santa Anita Racetrack."

Several more residents followed suit by expressing why they would like the city to approve the project but all statements at the meeting were not focused on who was liked more out of the two corporations. A few speakers remained on point and voiced their concerns about the negative impacts of the project. The top concern, which has been a hot button issue since the project was announced, is traffic.

The DEIR reports that an additional 15,000 vehicles will come and go from the mall daily after the initial rush has subsided.

Residents said they fear that any increase in the amount of traffic that already travels along Huntington Drive will be made exponentially worse if the project is improved despite the developers promise to improve the traffic flow among a majority of the intersections surrounding the property with technological upgrades. Several speakers said that with the 210 freeway already experiencing congestion the project will have "cars lined up for miles" on surface streets.

"The numbers don't add up," said resident Paul O'Hare. "There's no way you can add 15,000 more cars and improve traffic. Arcadia is a city of homes. I don't think we should make it a city of gridlock."

In connection with the traffic another resident said the proposed project would bring an increase in smog levels and said that the ones that would be most affected would be the children of the city.

The comment period on the DEIR for the project was originally scheduled to end on Dec. 6, but the city has extended the time an additional 8 days allowing the public an opportunity to submit comments until 5:30 on Dec. 14.

A second public meeting is scheduled to be held early next year, along with a recommendation from the Planning Commission.

For those interested in reviewing the Draft Environmental Impact Report in its entirety, visit www.ci.arcadia.ca.us.