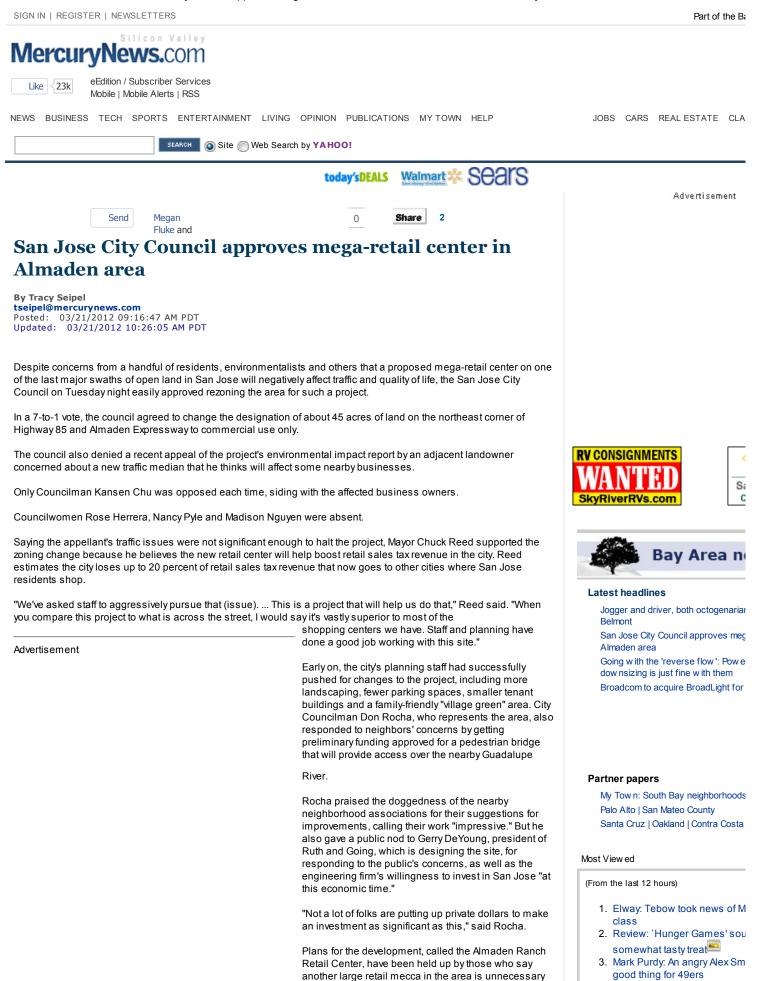
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San Jose City Council approves mega-retail center in Almaden area - San Jose Mercury News



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and will generate an even greater traffic nightmare than they say exists now.

The site is located across the street from a Best Buy and Walmart, adjacent to a shopping center that contains a Safeway store, among other retailers, and a larger shopping center with a Costco and Barnes & Noble less than a mile south on Almaden Expressway.

But city planners say current and proposed traffic light and road improvements, including an extension of Cherry Avenue from Almaden Expressway to Sanchez Drive, will reduce congestion.

And while the project would increase the area's retail density, San Jose officials predict the 400,000 square feet of retail space will become a regional center for many South San Jose shoppers.

Depending on the number of tenants, the city's Office of Economic Development believes the site, which could accommodate at least 30 retailers, both small and large, could generate from \$500,000 to \$750,000 in annual sales tax. City officials also think the site could create jobs for about

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700 workers and hundreds of construction jobs.

Unlike more traditional shopping centers, city planners say the Almaden Ranch Retail Center's appeal is its pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly retail development, different from those in the surrounding area.

While it will include some big and medium-size box retailers, it also will feature plenty of smaller stores and restaurants that will be closer to each other -- accented by wider sidewalks to encourage more walking and bicycling in the development. A village green area for outdoor events, such as a farmers market or live music, creates an important "sense of place," planners say.

Planning Director Joe Horwedel called it an opportunity "to take a typical shopping center and really turn it into something different."

Still, there are objections. In a three-page letter it sent last week to the mayor and council, the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club asked the council not to approve the new zoning, saying the project would only provide short-term economic benefits.

The group also said the project goes against the spirit of the latest General Plan, and that increased traffic from the site will generate more greenhouse gases.

"I urge you not to support the Almaden Ranch Retail Project," Judy Lindow, a San Jose resident and member of the Loma Prieta Chapter told the council. "I think the arguments are very clear."

Contact Tracy Seipel at 408 275-0140.

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