

Upon further review, Rolling Hills Estates and a developer are aiming to revitalize by



KEEPING CITY – NOT PROJECT – PEDESTRIAN

When Irvine-based BH Urban Equities LLC purchased a closed fast-food restaurant in Rolling Hills Estates, the company initially proposed building an upscale strip mall on the lot.

But the parcel, at the corner of Crenshaw Boulevard and Silver Spur Road, sat at the entrance of the city's flagging business core.

City officials plan to turn the hodgepodge of outdated medical buildings and nondescript stores there into what's dubbed Peninsula Village, a 45-acre urban enclave of homes, shops and restaurants.

The last thing they wanted was a car-oriented development setting the wrong tone for the lively, pedestrian-oriented Palos Verdes Peninsula downtown they hoped to create.

So, the company reconsidered its plans.

The result: an 18-unit condominium project with a central courtyard to encourage interaction among neighbors. What's called Silver Spur Court will include three live-work spaces suitable for a small business owner to hang out a shingle while residing above the

Story by Nick Green
Photo illustration by Chuck Bennett

DAILY BREEZE

office in a second-story home.

The company plans to break ground next month.

"It was a complete reawakening for our development firm in that we realized there was a much better use for a relatively well-located (lot) than just another suburban strip mall," said Greg Brown, the firm's managing principal. "It's a much more efficient use of land. It actually provides two uses on one property. ... It's a type of product that leads to less traffic."

Silver Spur Court is just the first in a series of planned mixed-use projects designed to revitalize the area.

Another quartet of developments containing 235 condominiums and ground-floor retail space have either received city approval or are under review.

Another four, including the largest of them all — a 150-unit condominium project on a vacant tract along Deep Valley Drive — are in

the early-planning stages, with formal building applications yet to be submitted.

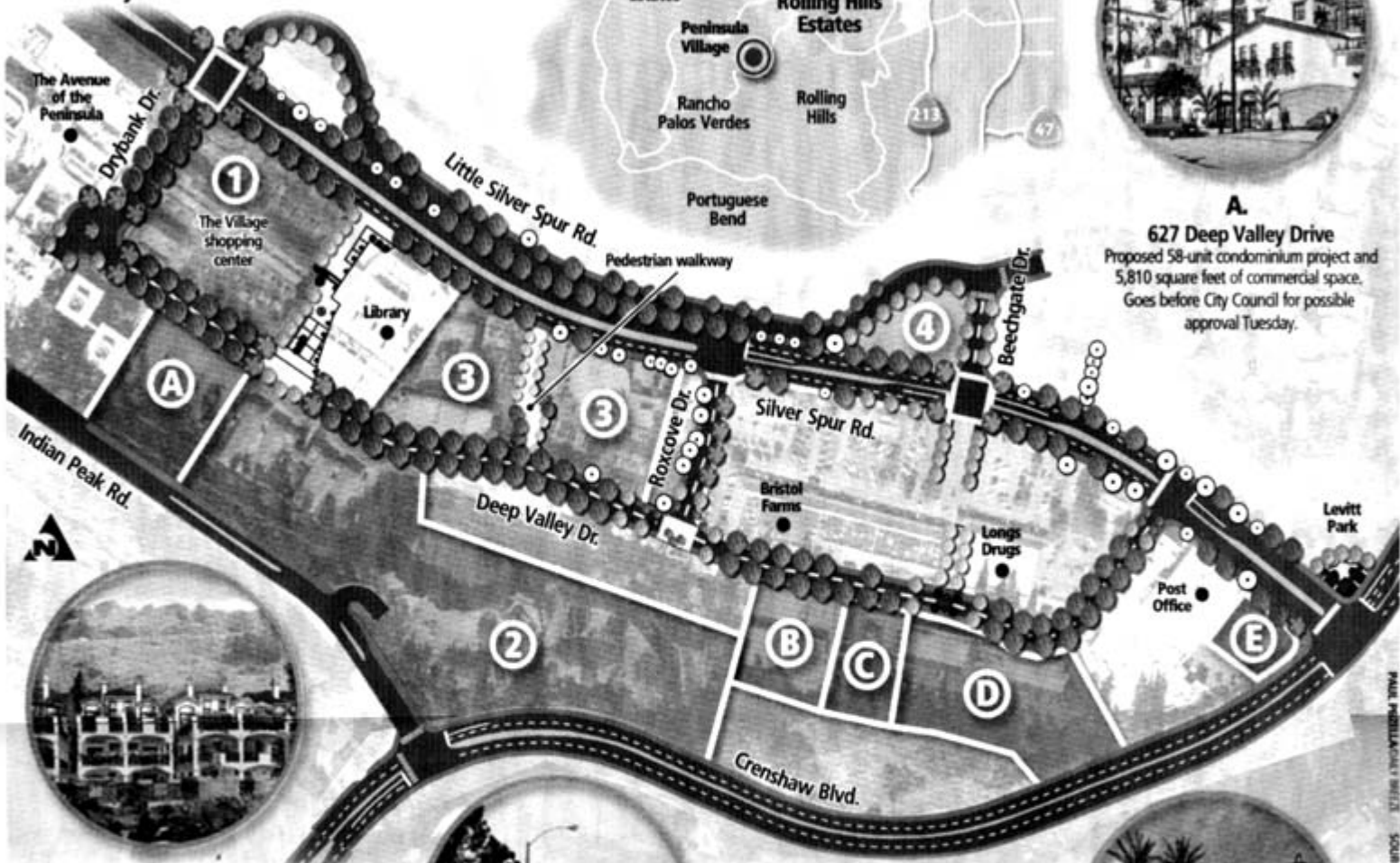
The relatively dense Peninsula Village plan is a radical departure for a small, semi-rural community better known for its horsey set and rambling ranch-style homes.

But city officials believed there was no other option for a city that relies on sales tax revenue for one-third of its operating budget. With its then-enclosed mall struggling to survive in an increasingly competitive retail market in the mid-1990s, city officials customarily ambivalent to economic development sensed they could lose their golden goose without a more aggressive approach.

The solution: add 1,000 or so apartments or condominiums, housing types in short supply on The Hill, to give retailers and restaurant owners a larger customer base.

At the same time, it was hoped that would create a sense of community, drawing long-time Peninsula residents seeking to downsize or young professionals seeking entry-level housing.

Peninsula Village is located within the commercial core of Rolling Hills Estates and covers approximately 45 acres. Presently, the Peninsula Village has few unifying architectural or street elements that clearly define a sense of place. A revitalization of the area is under way.



A.
627 Deep Valley Drive
 Proposed 58-unit condominium project and 5,810 square feet of commercial space. Goes before City Council for possible approval Tuesday.



B.
827 Deep Valley Drive (rear)
 Proposed 16-unit condominium project.



C.
901 Deep Valley Drive
 Approved 41-unit senior condominium project. Groundbreaking early this year.



D.
927 Deep Valley Drive
 Proposed 120-unit condominium and 10,000-square-foot commercial project.



E.
981 Silver Spur Drive
 Approved 18-unit condominium project with three live-work units. Groundbreaking in March.

Possible projects

1. The Village shopping center on a 3-acre site could be turned into a mixed-use, retail-condominium project. Application could be turned in to the city early this year.
2. Long-vacant 7-acre parcel eyed for a mixed-use 150-unit condominium project.
3. City concept is for current parcel between library and Roxcove Drive as a village square with pedestrian walkway surrounded by homes and stores above subterranean parking.
4. Former Arco gas station could become 23-unit condominium project with ground-floor retail stores. Project on hold indefinitely.

PROJECT: Some neighbors fear development will mean density, congestion

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But the trick, in a community usually opposed to growth, is how to accomplish that without exacerbating traffic or impair the quality of life its affluent residents prize.

That meant no crowded, parking-scarce urban streetscape on the scale of Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade.

By incorporating modest amounts of commercial and office space into condominium complexes, it's hoped some residents will live and work in the easily walkable area rather than taking to The Hill's limited road network.

"We were sort of forced into it," conceded Councilwoman Susan Seamans, who championed the concept almost from the outset. "I think the way we've gone about it has been deliberate and careful. ... There will be some growing pains for sure. But certainly the people who live there will have that kind of (urban) lifestyle if that's what they're looking for and it will certainly benefit the people on the Peninsula to have a more vibrant shopping district."

Not everyone is enamored of the city's vision.

Concern about forced departure

Some medical professionals worry the housing could force them out, something city officials acknowledge they must address.

A few residents in surrounding neighborhoods fret the redevelopment could create untenable congestion in the compact valley or roads leading off The Hill.

And some store owners fear the makeover could lead to a lack of parking and reduce access to their businesses for customers and delivery trucks.

Gary Straub, owner of Art Glass by Straubs, a stained-glass studio that's been on the Peninsula 35 years, minces no words when he describes the plan as "anti-business."

"They're looking at how much money they can bring in with all these extra bedrooms, but they're forcing out the businesses," he said. "The city has this pie-in-the-sky attitude of making this like Third Street Promenade or (Old Town) Pasadena or those cliché areas. ... No one is going to stroll down the street."

Still, across the street from Straub, watchmaker and jeweler Mack Kervorkian said he has struggled to establish a clientele since

“

I've seen a lot of small cities grapple with this notion of making a pedestrian-friendly district and in most cases those grand visions never come to fruition. In this case I must say I was skeptical, but the city is about to get it off the ground.

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— BRUCE SOROUDI,

the developer of a proposed condominium complex with ground-floor retail in Rolling Hills Estates

opening his store a couple of years ago.

"It's very hard to do business here," he said. "I don't have any walk-by customers."

Developers and city officials believe the influx of homes will support, not harm businesses, such as The Avenue of the Peninsula, the open-air shopping center that succeeded the enclosed mall and is the main retail anchor of Peninsula Village.

Already, a Peninsula Village plan devised by renowned urban planner Stefanos Polyzoides has been watered down, removing some areas where homes might have been built in an effort to find the right residential-retail balance.

Developers maintain the village plan's residential component will subsidize the construction of ground-floor retail that would otherwise not occur.

"The land cost is too high to support any new construction retail-wise," said Rick Edler, who bought and renovated a 1960s-era office building near The Avenue of the Peninsula that was only a third full, but now has a waiting list.

Still, Rick Abelson, a Redondo Beach urban planner and UCLA lecturer with no connection to the project, urged caution.

He said that while residential developers can make scads of money, the city must ensure the retail mix doesn't become an afterthought.

"You've got to be really careful in there

On the Web

More details about the plans for Peninsula Village are available at the city's Web site, www.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us, under the community issues section.

— you don't want to upset the balance," he said. "In general, that's not a bad spot to do that kind of thing — a mixed-use village. Is Rolling Hills Estates ready for that is the question? I can see there would be tension for a project like this.

"This is much more of an urban kind of density than you would find in Rolling Hills Estates usually. They better have a really good land plan, a really good development strategy and this had better be of the highest quality."

City officials say they have similar concerns.

An environmental analysis of the Peninsula Village plan, scheduled for completion by year's end, will examine the area's infrastructure and associated issues to ensure overbuilding doesn't occur.

Improvements considered

An estimated almost \$6 million in road and sidewalk improvements are contemplated for everything from trees and benches to pedestrian walkways and a small park.

"There's room for improvement in terms of aesthetics," said Anton Kotze, the general manager of The Avenue of the Peninsula, which has struggled to attract shoppers since its 1999 renovation.

City officials also concede they must do a better job of explaining the village idea to residents — Councilman Frank Zerunyan is planning a public meeting this spring — so

that people buy into it.

Despite the number of projects popping up, city officials said they're looking for a gradual evolution of the area that could take years, perhaps decades, to accomplish.

Some grand plans — a town square connected by pedestrian walkways to streets and surrounded by stores and homes — represent little more than a wish list.

Still, city officials are taking a proactive approach in guiding development proposals.

For instance, a proposed assisted-living facility on the site of a car wash near the mall was nixed in favor of a condominium complex with ground-floor retail.

Developer happy with end results

It took developer Bruce Soroudi six years to devise a project that made the city happy, but he's pleased with the final product — and the surrounding environs.

"Traffic-wise this new project will generate less traffic than the existing project ... all you have there day in, day out is cars coming in and going out," he said. "I've seen a lot of small cities grapple with this notion of making a pedestrian-friendly district and in most cases those grand visions never come to fruition. In this case I must say I was skeptical, but the city is about to get it off the ground."

Indeed, the Peninsula Village plan has already been selected by the Southern California Association of Governments as one of two demonstration projects intended to serve as models of smart growth.

"It's not a community that most people think of today as being on the cutting edge of (urban) planning," said Brian Wallace, an associate planner with the intergovernmental organization. "It was a really important gesture that Rolling Hills Estates was willing to embrace these policies of redevelopment and infill growth that many cities in their similar situation would not really think about yet."

Brown, the developer behind Silver Spur Court, also lauds the city for its innovative approach to creating an urban community.

"The plan scared a few people at the start — when you talk about urbanization and adding density to a very aesthetic, small-scale village, people are very afraid of that," he said. "But people have ultimately accepted this plan. This plan should set the stage for the next 30 to 50 years for the village."