

DEL MAR TIMES

Center planning weekend draws input

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By Karen Billing

The San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority wrapped up a three-day design workshop Sunday afternoon for a proposed lagoon nature center with a design they hope will take flight.

Susan Carter, deputy director of the JPA, said visitor traffic remained steady during their open house-style workshop over the weekend. At the most about 25 people filled the construction trailers on San Andreas Drive, sharing input on what kind of nature center the lagoon needs.

Representatives from Roesling Nakamura Terada Architects, Spurlock-Poirer Landscape Architects and interpretive planners The Acorn Group worked hard all weekend designing the center.

The final design includes two buildings, linked by a center courtyard. The buildings' flat roofs will serve as viewing platforms for visitors.

"I think of it like a cliff dwelling that you might find somewhere in the southwest," said architect Ralph Roesling of the completed design.

There will also be two solar chimneys, creating small towers. The larger one will have a slanted feature, creating the look of a long-necked shore bird.

Solar chimneys are vertical shafts that use solar energy to naturally ventilate a building. One can be seen at the New Children's Museum in downtown San Diego.

The center will contain space for rangers, docents and a viewing lab for scientists to work out of. Across the courtyard will be an open space for exhibits and theater for film screenings. Upstairs will be a community room for meetings as well as the viewing platforms.

Del Mar Mayor Crystal Crawford asked if they had considered making accommodations for events or possibly weddings. Roesling said they did plan for a small staging kitchen.

Plans also include repairing the habitat with coastal sage scrub and chaparral, creating a riparian habitat and restoring some natural knolls. Along the Coast to Crest trail surrounding the mudflats, they hope to add benches, shade structures and information signage.

The parking will be directly off San Andreas with 60 spots on a permeable surface, likely decomposed granite.

Roesling estimated the cost of the new center could be \$3.6 million although Carter thinks it will be more - San Elijo's center, smaller than the proposed lagoon center, cost \$5.5 million.

The level of traffic and noise on Via de la Valle presented a challenge for the designers, as well as the goal of situating the parking lot somewhere it won't interfere with the experience. They also grappled with differences in opinion of what the nature center should be.

They decided they needed the interior space of the building for programs and exhibits. While they need the building, it is not meant to be the focus, landscape architect Andy Spurlock said.

"It should be the direct experience of being in a really great place not just things happening in the building," Spurlock said.

Jacqueline Winterer, the president of the Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley expressed concern about the size of



Shore birds sing in the mudflats of the San Dieguito Lagoon over the weekend as a nature center was being designed.

Photo by: Karen Billing

the building.

Carter said that while the proposed nature center is 12,000 square feet, half of that space is for the viewing deck. The actual building is only 6,000 square feet large, she said.

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