

**Fairfield Daily Republic – April 29, 2009**

### **Plaza centerpiece of Nut Tree plan**

VACAVILLE - The idea to put the Nut Tree train, the carousel and other Nut Tree Family Park amenities out where passing highway motorists can better see them played well to the Vacaville City Council Tuesday night.

'I think we are back on track,' Councilman Curtis Hunt said of the plan. 'People will notice.'

Westrust Ventures, who operates the prominent shopping center, wants to tear out the last of the bocce ball courts in front of the Nut Tree Villages and create a plaza where people a place to relax and better enjoy the surrounding businesses.

The train, along with the carousel and the ice cream stand would be moved into what would be called the Historic Nut Tree Plaza.

Ricardo Capretta of Westrust told the council he is investing \$1 million 'to create a stimulus' to increase business on the Nut Tree shopping center's east side by creating the plaza.

'We want to create an energy in middle of the project,' Capretta said.

He is also planning a second phase which involves improving landscaping around the historic Harbison House and better connecting the shopping center to yet-to-be-developed areas north and east of the Nut Tree.

This also includes plans to expand the train track back into the family park area, but Capretta said he has to examine issues such as pedestrian liability and track grading.

The Family Park was closed in January after failing to draw enough people to its secluded location and its owner, Nut Tree Associates, is selling the park to Westrust.

Capretta vowed to honor the agreement between the Family Park's original owner and the Vacaville Museum to support the Harbison House as a place to showcase the Nut Tree's history.

Councilmembers liked Capretta's ideas, but also stressed that the old Family Park area should not be neglected once the major attractions such as the train and the carousel are moved.

Several Nut Tree business owners lauded Capretta's proposal and asked City Hall to move as quickly as possible to get Capretta the permits he needs to build the Historic Nut Tree Plaza by summer.

'We need to move quickly on this,' said Carlos Villasenor, who owns the Villa Carona restaurant.

Even former Family Park employees who ran the train showed up to voice their support, saying they and others are looking forward to riding the train again.

'I can't wait to come back,' train operator Jim Holtz said.

This is Westrust's latest effort to make the Nut Tree shopping center more profitable and fill up its remaining empty spaces with tenants.

Last year, it asked the City Council for approval to bring in a wider selection of non-retail businesses such as optometrist offices, medical offices and learning centers.

Councilmembers were leery about approving those changes, saying it would dilute the vision the city had for Nut Tree and they preferred to see more retail-oriented businesses.

Reach Ian Thompson at 427-6976 or [ithompson@dailyrepublic.net](mailto:ithompson@dailyrepublic.net).