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Council supports a Laguna park

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

Although unsure just how to proceed, the Sebastopol City Council Tuesday made clear their support for the idea of a linear park along the channel of the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

A preliminary discussion of the possible park began with council members trying to define it, and concluded with a commitment to hold a special study session to clarify the city's intentions enough to engage a consultant to begin making some specific plans. "We're complete neophytes in knowing how to proceed," conceded Mayor Anne Magnie.

City manager Mel Davis told the council they would have no shortage of candidates to help them formulate a park plan. Interested consultants "are already lining up for the job, he said.

The linear park concept is among the ideas advanced in the report of the city's Laguna Advisory Committee, and it is widely envisioned as something that would extend well beyond Sebastopol's municipal boundaries and include a bike and pedestrian pathway near the Laguna's main

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LAGUNA

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channel with interpretive information about the native animal and plant life posted along the way.

Sebastopol already owns seven parcels totalling 87 acres along the Laguna off Morris Street, including the eight acre Laguna Youth Park, a sewer pump station, and a 58-acre parcel on the east side of the channel which is used for irrigation of waste from the Barlow Company apple processing plant. Some portion of these lands could be incorporated into a strip of park while retaining many of the current uses, Davis suggested.

The county's Ragle Ranch Park was cited as a possible model, in that it has portions that are extensively developed into ball fields, such as those already in place at the Laguna Youth Park, as well as a larger area surrounding Atascadero Creek that has been retained in it's natural condition with just a few unpaved hiking trails providing public access.

Davis also reported on preliminary talks with Joan Vilms of the Sonoma Land Trust regarding possible acquisition and preservation of a 25-acre parcel of riparian forest land in the Laguna just south of Highway 12 and the Village Park campground (which the city is also attempting to acquire separately). The land is owned by Southern Pacific Railroad and includes the corridor where the tracks crossed the channel at Sebastopol's eastern edge.

"It's a magnificent area," Davis told the council enthusiastically. "The trees are unbelievable. This is all very much untouched."

No price or appraisal for the property has been set so far, and the question of who would ultimately own the land is still up in the air, but the council agreed to work further with Vilms and the Trust to pursue efforts to secure the property as a publicly held and protected resource.

"The main objective is to get it into the public domain," said councilman Richard Johnson. "Let's use all the resources we can."