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Wetlands ordinance controversy continues

Concern about impact on Morris Street businesses

by Dan Collins

Not everybody is as thrilled with Sebastopol's revised wetlands ordinance as city council members and environmentalists seem to be.

Morris Street businessmen are concerned that the ordinance, which has yet to go through public hearings before the planning commission and city council, may restrict their businesses and cause their property values to drop.

"We're deadset against putting the wetlands designation over private property," said Guenter Meiburg, president of Sebastopol Ready-Mix concrete company.

No objections

Meiburg had no objections to the protective wetlands designation when it was originally applied to city-owned property, but says now that doing so was a "foot in the door" leading to restricting development on private land adjacent to the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

"The only reason for this wetlands ordinance is to attempt to control growth adjacent to the Laguna," Meiburg said of the ordinance, complaining that economic considerations are too often ignored by the city council.

"We need an ordinance requiring an economic impact report along with the often misused environmental impact report," he suggested.

Meiburg fears that the ordinance would make it virtually impossible for his company to build on the site. He's convinced that it would "affect the sale price of the property considerably."

"Sebastopol is in the grips of a special interest group, pure and simple," he said, calling mayor Anne Magnie and councilman Nichols Stewart "pure puppets of Sebastopol Tommorrow," referring to the group behind much of the city's environmental reform.

The ordinance, says Meiburg, is "absolute overkill," since development in the area is already subject to review by several regulatory agencies including the California Department of Fish and Game and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Dan Davis, a demolition contractor whose business is located on Morris Street directly adjacent to the Laguna, doesn't expect such a catastrophic effect.

Of his three acres, the two which abut Morris Street have already entered the permit process, and he doesn't believe

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> —Guenter Meiburg

> "I'm not one to destroy the Laguna by any means, but if you don't let a local business grow, that kind of thing kills business."
> —Brad Benedetti

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