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CHANGE IN PLAN URGED

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Council votes to drop controversial bypass

SEBASTOPOL — The Sebastopol City Council took the first step Wednesday toward eliminating the controversial Route E bypass from the Sebastopol general plan.

The council voted 3-2 to amend the general plan to eliminate the roadway, which would go around the city along the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

The council was spurred to action in part by a developer who complained his project has been in limbo for two years because of the proposed bypass.

"How long are we going to play ping-pong with this thing?" asked Councilman Bill Roventini before the vote.

The city last year commissioned an environmental-impact report on the southern portion of the bypass, which would connect Sebastopol Avenue and Highway 116 South. Hearings on the report drew an overflow crowd of angry opponents.

Opponents, with backing from the state of California, convinced the City Council that the report was inadequate because it failed to cover the northerly portion, which would connect Sebastopol Avenue and Occidental Road.

The city was left with the question of whether to proceed with an additional study or drop the route altogether.

Wednesday's meeting was the first on the subject of Route E since the election of two new council members, Gwen Anderson and Howard Reeser, both of whom oppose Route E. Bill Roventini is also opposed to the bypass.

Councilman Richard Johnson, however, repeated the message of caution from Sonoma County Public Works Director Don Head. "Don't slam the door on your options," Johnson said.

If the general-plan amendment is adopted, "you have forever lost the option to build a roadway in

that vicinity," Johnson warned fellow council members.

Roventini said no roadway would be feasible along the Laguna wetlands because it is "an environmentally sensitive area."

The amendment process takes approximately 90 days and will include hearings before both the planning commission and council.

If the amendment is approved, developer Harry Polley can re-submit his proposal for a 28-unit Suffolk Meadows condominium project on Palm Avenue acreage that is traversed by the proposed bypass.

"This whole delay has created a tremendous financial problem for the partnership" that is developing Suffolk Meadows, Polley told the council.

On advice from the city attorney, the council denied the project without prejudice and invited Polley to return after action on the general plan amendment.