

Sebastopol council dumps Route E

by Bruce Robinson

Sebastopol City Council members spent the first part of their July 18 meeting discussing traffic bypass options with two county officials, then later in the evening took the initial action to drop the

long-discussed Route E bypass from the city's general plan.

The 3-2 vote carried out a recommendation made earlier by the city's planning commission, which concluded that environmental obstacles facing the proposed new roadway next to the Laguna could

not be overcome, even with the implementation of a series of very expensive mitigation measures meant to soften the impact of the road's construction.

There will be a series of public hearings before both the planning commission and the city council on the general

plan amendment to drop the bypass during the next 90 days, before the action is finalized. Richard Johnson, who voted against the motion along with Mayor Tom Miller, argued against it, warning that the change would eliminate any future possibility of constructing a roadway along the city's eastern perimeter.

However, cancelling Route E would clear the way for a proposed 28-unit condominium project, which would be built on a Palm Avenue site that lies in the path of the controversial bypass route. Developer Harry Polley will be able to re-submit his project to the city if the general plan amendment is adopted. Polley complained to the council Wednesday that his plans have been held up for two years by the city, while it debated Route E.

Earlier, Supervisor Ernie Carpenter and County Public Works Director Don Head told the council that while they envision an eventual connecting route between Todd Road and Highway 116, it will face a long and difficult struggle to win a priority for funding from either the state or the county. On a more positive note, however, the county officials indicated that they expect major improvements on the portion of Occidental Road between the Laguna bridge and Highway 116 to be completed in the near future.

As for a north-south bypass route around Sebastopol, Head and Carpenter agree that Llano road is the only existing route that could fulfill that function, although they were unsure if it would provide the desired traffic relief.

Head recommended that traffic studies be done as a preliminary to determine how new routes might alter traffic patterns in the area east and south of Sebastopol, and at the same time he encouraged the addition of "plan lines" to city and county planning documents to keep potential roadways open. Already, he cautioned, many of the possible alignments for a bypass have been precluded by development of scattered new homes in the region.