

Most Laguna recommendations accepted

88-106 ✓
SEPT¹⁵ 88
THE PAPER

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

The Sebastopol City Council completed its item-by-item review of the recommendations from its Laguna Advisory Committee September 7 and agreed to translate virtually all the 34 proposed actions into municipal policies.

The outstanding exception, once again, was the controversial "no net fill" proposal for which a specific council consensus could not be reached, although the members did appear to be moving toward a common position.

Discussing each item with members of the Laguna committee throughout the five-hour special session, council members worked through the interlocking series of recommendations regarding water quality, wildlife and vegetation, interactions with other governmental agencies, and, of course, fill.

Three members of the council were still at it late in the evening when the fill issue was the last item to be dealt with, and all three took differing stances. Mayor Anne Magnie reiterated her

SEE LAGUNA, BACK PAGE

BACK PAGE →

earlier comments that she found "no discernible merit" to the no-net-fill proposal, and could not justify adopting it in the absence of measurable benefits. The Sonoma County Water Agency has reported that even the maximum possible infilling in the entire low-lying area of Sebastopol would raise floodwaters only one eighth of an inch on the Russian River.

Councilman Richard Johnson wanted to know where in the Laguna fill would come from for construction needs. No net fill without a borrow area is "tantamount to a no-development policy in the heart of our industrial area," Johnson said, adding that finding the answer to that question was "critical to my position" on the issue.

Councilman Nick Stewart offered a "paradoxical" compromise, but failed to attract the support of his colleagues. He proposed a conditional adoption of no-net-fill, with the provision that it might be removed later, if the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as expected, imposes new development restrictions in the entire Laguna flood basin.

"If FEMA bans fill elsewhere in the basin," Stewart reasoned, "the argument of cumulative impacts [from infilling in Sebastopol] is null and void," since other filling to create the additional impacts would be prohibited. The city of Sebastopol has applied for an exemption from the expected FEMA regulations.

Councilman Tom Miller abstained from the fill issue, as he has throughout the extended discussions of it, because he works for a business located below the 76-foot flood level. Bill Roventini departed the meeting a little earlier in the evening.

Suzanne Nelson, a member of the

Laguna Advisory Committee said that she was pleased with most of the council's actions. "The one thing I have difficulty with is the mayor's stance on no-net-fill. It's not logical. I just don't understand it," said Nelson.

Nelson said that even if fill in the Sebastopol area of the Laguna had little effect on raising the Russian River, the cumulative effects of several municipalities filling in the Laguna had to be considered. Nelson said that other municipalities would look to Sebastopol as an example if filling in the wastelands was to be stopped.

"We have the need to clean up our own backyard first," she asserted.

Among the other Laguna actions were some that the city has already initiated, such as planning for a linear park along the Laguna channel and cooperation with other local agencies that are studying the freshwater marsh. New activities identified by the Laguna committee include a push for fencing along the channel to keep livestock away from the banks, and possible creation of a riparian preservation ordinance for Sebastopol. Such a law would likely extend to the protection of other remaining waterways in Sebastopol, such as Zimpher Creek and Atascadero Creek.

The council will again discuss the recommendations in October after the council and city staff meet to decide whether the city's wetlands ordinance should be re-written to incorporate new Laguna policies or if there are other means to carry them out.