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Laguna...

(continued from front page)

elevation. Richard Nichols spoke for the now disbanded Laguna Study Committee, standing in for committee chairman Bob Sharp, who missed the meeting due to illness.

"We did not intend for Sebastopol to take the entire lead," Nichols said. "We're looking for moral leadership to protect it."

The committee had held a press conference April 18 to inform the local media what it hoped to accomplish at the public hearing. Last week was a dress rehearsal; this was the real thing.

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?

Haigwood produced an aerial map of the Laguna area lying in the Sebastopol city limits. Drawn down the middle was a white line.

"I've been asked to explain our recommendations in 25 words or less," Haigwood explained.

Specifically, he wanted to clarify the two most controversial recommendations of the Laguna report: no net fill and no development below the 76-foot elevation flood plain.

Land on the east side of the white line should not be developed, Haigwood said. Land on the west side of the line could be developed provided there was no net fill in the flood plain. Property west of the line but still within the flood plain included developments on Morris St. and a planned subdivision called Palm Terrace (see story on front page). Part of the Palm Terrace project, however, lies past the no development line.

Any land fill within the 76-foot "no net fill" flood plain had to be compensated by taking an equal amount of land out of the Laguna, to prevent downstream flooding of the Russian River.

Helen Libeu was called upon by Nichols to explain the term "no net fill." Libeu — using a saucer, a shotglass nearly full of water and a handful of pennies — demonstrated why a no net fill plan was important.

Adding two pennies at a time ("Let's say Sebastopol puts in their two cents."), she showed how the increase of fill, or pennies, eventually caused the water to overflow. To illustrate no development within the wetlands of the Laguna, she did the same demonstration but added some riparian vegetation — in this case a dandelion.

She showed how the pennies crowded out the dandelion. The Laguna report is adamant about saving the riparian vegetation, which is the many varieties of plants that grow along the Laguna and are endemic to that area.

LESS THAN AN INCH

However, a memo by City Engineer Paul Schoch stated that if the "worst case scenario" was to occur and all of the land in the "no net fill" area of the flood plain were developed, the flood plain would only rise by five-eighths of an inch.

But as some pointed out, it might be the five-eighths of an inch that destroys a house. It could be a very important measurement, some argued.

Morris St. property owners said they had lived with the floods for years. Would they be penalized for

building there long before the report was issued, they asked?

Bob Harder of the North Coast Builders Exchange took up those concerns. He suggested the non-controversial issues be adopted at once to protect the Laguna, but he cautioned the council to think very carefully about no net fill requirements.

Harder said that property probably should never have been developed in the flood plain in the past and shouldn't be in the future. But some were caught in the middle, he said.

Others, such as developer John Garry Taylor, said worrying about Morris St. was just nitpicking.

"I think we're looking at Mickey Mouse kicking dirt on our front porch, while King Kong's crapping in our backyard," Taylor said.

"ALL EYES ARE ON SEBASTOPOL."

Some wondered why the burden to protect the Laguna was being put on Sebastopol. Since the Laguna encompassed a large part of the county, why wasn't the Board of Supervisors taking the lead, some asked.

Supervisor Ernie Carpenter, who attended the meeting, vowed to take the matter to the board. And Congressman Doug Bosco said he wanted the Laguna designated a National Wildlife Refuge.

"All eyes are on Sebastopol," said committee member Suzanne Nelson.

The council will continue the Laguna report discussions May 23 at 7 p.m. at the Vets Building.

To discover what is happening this week, check our Calendar listings on page 4B.