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Palm Terrace will be a Laguna "test case"

BY TOM ROTH

The environmental consultant for Sebastopol's embattled Palm Terrace subdivision said this week that he views the city's final decision on the project as a "test case" for future development around the periphery of the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

"Whatever the city decides will reverberate with all the other projects along the Laguna," said Leonard Charles, to a handfull of participants at an Environmental Impact Report "scoping hearing" Tuesday.

The low turnout was not indicative of the controversy that the 29-unit subdivision has engendered. After the project was approved by the city last year, members of Laguna Today and Tomorrow went to court arguing that the city's environmental checklist, based on an EIR of an earlier version of the project, was inadequate. Superior Court Judge Lawrence Sawyer subsequently ruled in favor of the citizens' group, rescinding city approval, and ordering the city to contract for a new EIR.

Charles said that his study would cover the project's impact on traffic, sewage, noise, schools, as well as special Laguna considerations, such as views from the proposed wildlife

sanctuary, pollutant loading, and hydrology.

Charles said that he doubted that pollution run-off from roofs, sidewalks and streets in the subdivision would be much greater than from existing cattle grazing on the property. Displaced floodwaters in the Laguna would also be practically unnoticeable, he said.

Charles concluded that he didn't expect any of the Laguna impacts to be overwhelming, but that they were important anyway, in order to determine the incremental effect of development on the area. "Somewhere along the line is the straw that breaks the camel's back," said Charles.

Much of the discussion at the meeting centered around non-Laguna related problems. Mark Overholser wanted to make sure that Palm Terrace residents would be prevented from parking on nearby Walker Ave. Overholser and several neighbors became engaged in an animated discussion of neighborhood parking problems.

But when Charles said that much of the study would rely on information supplied by the City Planning Department and other agencies—that statement upset Laguna activist Helen Libeu. "If planning had done its job you wouldn't have a contract," declared Libeu.

Charles said that he expected his report to be completed in four to five weeks, when it will then be presented to city officials for their review.