

Council to hear wetlands ordinance

by Dan Collins

A plan for preservation of the sensitive wetlands contained in the Laguna de Santa Rosa is one step closer to completion following a decision by the Sebastopol Planning Commission last week approving revisions to the city's wetlands ordinance.

The ordinance is geared toward protecting the Laguna environment from damage due to

new development or careless use of adjacent lands.

The commissioners, having discussed the ordinance for several weeks, finally concluded their review of its content, voting unanimously to forward their recommendations to the city council, which must hold public hearings before the law can go into effect.

Although changes in the content of the ordinance were mini-

mal, some alterations in the language contained in it were made.

The greatest amount of attention was given to the definitions designating the three wetland zones. A property's designation as wetlands (W), secondary wetlands (WS) or fringe wetlands (WF) indicates which set of restrictions applies to use of the parcel.

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Wetlands . . .

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Discussion of the requirements for application of the WS district resulted in a definition which includes lands "lying above the 100-year flood line which are in a biologically altered state but have a direct physical or functional relationship to wetlands areas or ecosystems." Such lands may or may not contain wetlands or vegetation associated with them.

The definition of WF districts was altered so that they include lands which may have a "significant impact" on a wetlands area and its ecosystem. The previous wording included lands having a "direct or indirect impact," but the commission found that to be too vague.

Commissioner Bill Haigwood explained that the commission sought to eliminate some of the "glittering generalities" in the ordinance in order to make it more understandable.

Haigwood said he felt that the ordinance may be a bit too restrictive on lands not wetlands proper, but that it represented a balance of interests.

"It gives protection to the wetlands, which will satisfy the environmentalists, without making reasonable development impossible," Haigwood said.

Commissioner Sarah Gurney, who advocated optimal protection of the wetlands throughout the debate, said that she was pleased that the amount of protection placed on the Laguna.

"I would have preferred that