

Sidetracks

Preserve laguna with fairness

by John B. Burns

The push to preserve the beleaguered laguna de Santa Rosa, the second largest freshwater marsh system in Northern California, has generated widespread support from the Sebastopol community to the halls of Congress where Doug Bosco is seeking federal legislation to declare the area a national wildlife refuge. But lost in the debate to preserve this widely acknowledged environmental resource has been the unusually unfair requirements which the City of Sebastopol has exacted on some of the property owners adjacent to the laguna.

Take the case of local builder John Garry Taylor, who some time ago purchased a piece of property near the intersection of Sebastopol and Morris streets directly adjacent to the laguna. When he bought the parcel, it was zoned for light industrial, a designation allowing for the construction of buildings intended to house light industrial businesses. The price Taylor paid for the property reflected the economic potential of the property as designated in the city's general plan.

But when Taylor recently approached the city planning commission to seek a zoning change from light industrial to commercial, a change consistent with the general plan and endorsed earlier by the city, the rules were suddenly changed. Now, Taylor was told, the city was going to impose a whole new set of restrictions on his property that would, in all likelihood, result in lowering the property value by requiring any development to have a use permit before approval. Given the paperwork and political opposition likely for any development nearby the laguna, this will inevitably and significantly increase the costs of building anything on the site. The net result is a losing proposition for Taylor, a Sebastopol native, who thought he was playing by the rules until the city decided to change them.

Fair play? Hardly. It is understandable for the city to push for new ways to protect and preserve the laguna as a rare natural resource and a greenbelt separating our town from the sprawling megalopolis to the east. But it behooves those in authority to exercise these newfound policies with an eye for fairness.

89.9

Sebastopol Times
& News

April 13, 1989