

Laguna Park recreational use debated

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by Dawn Armstrong

Is the city's proposed Laguna Linear Park really linear?

Does passive dedication preclude active recreation?

Can some of the city's recreational needs be incorporated into the plan?

These and other questions were raised last week at what was expected to be routine city council approval of a local park project originally envisioned eight years ago.

The controversy stemmed from plans by local recreational enthusiasts to use 13 of the 75 city

owned acres near the laguna for new sports fields. Whether the active use of the park can be smoothly integrated with the primarily passive uses in areas immediately adjacent to the cherished waterway is now a challenge for whichever person finally is selected to design the park.

The council voted two to one to include the proposed ballfields in the Request for Proposal (RFP) sent out to prospective park designers.

The original vision of the park evolved from the 1982 revised General Plan for Sebasto-

pol. The '82 plan proposed to develop a linear, or strip, park on city-owned land along the east and west banks of the Laguna channel.

Community interest led to a vision of restoration and protection of the wetlands' plant and animal life, which culminated in January of 1988 when the Laguna Advisory Committee published a report on the laguna's environmental value to the city which approved \$100,000 in redevelopment funding to create a master plan for the park.

Meanwhile, Sebastopol Little League volunteers who were de-

veloping the nearby Laguna Youth Park let it be known informally that their ultimate vision was to add more ball fields on city property northwest of the Sebastopol Community Center. Formal petition for the lands was planned after current fields were completed.

According to Mindi Marshall, representing both the Little League and Sebastopol Soccer League, "Sebastopol now has an opportunity to conserve two resources at once: riparian habitat for native plants and animals, and recreational opportunities (Please turn to page A9)

Park . . .

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for our youth." She referred to parks in Calistoga and Santa Cruz as examples of how multi-use fields can be landscaped to

fit natural settings.

Marshall said that 3,000 Sebastopol area boys and girls are served by baseball, softball, and soccer youth groups each year.

With a steady participation increase of 8-10 percent annually, fields from Tomales to Bode-

ga, and Cazadero to Sebastopol are now used to capacity. Adult and other organized youth sports groups are denied access to these facilities to satisfy the unrelenting growth.

The request to consider active recreation compatibility with the original passive concept of the park seemed to come as a complete surprise to councilwoman Anne Magnie. Her vote against the wording in the RFP reflected her concern that the original vision for the park was being violated.

Councilman Richard Johnson voted for adoption, expressing his belief that the issue of multiple use had come up at a relatively early stage of the park development process.

The deciding vote to consider active recreation was cast by Mayor Tom Miller, who stated, "Multiple use doesn't bother me. We have an obligation to our young people. Maybe the park would be used more"

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