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# Sebastopol may buy Laguna land

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SEBASTOPOL — City officials are searching for money to buy environmentally sensitive land next to the Laguna de Santa Rosa with the hope it will resolve a lawsuit filed by property owners whose proposed development was rejected by the City Council.

The City Council on Tuesday night authorized Planning Director Richard Spitler to apply for state grant money for the purchase. The grant would match potential funding by Sonoma County's Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

The property is where the Palm Terrace subdivision was planned on eight acres. It is considered the last piece of "upland" grassland inside city limits where Laguna wildlife can seek refuge during flooding.

Officials say some of the money also might be used to buy some of the adjacent proposed Saddleburr subdivision, which is just outside city limits.

The property owners and developers of Palm Terrace last spring filed suit in hopes of getting a court to set aside the City Council's rejection of their 25-unit housing proposal.

The lawsuit is pending, but city officials have been attempting to reach a compromise to avoid a costly court battle.

The lawsuit was filed by Palm Terrace property owner Yolanda Ghilotti of San Rafael, who was joined by relatives as well as partner George Young, a Sebastopol contractor.

The project has been on the drawing boards for 13 years and has been through a half-dozen revisions. There have been approv-

als for various housing projects on the site, but the Ghilottis allowed the permits to expire without building.

Following another City Council approval in 1988, environmentalists sued, managing to block the development until more detailed environmental studies could be conducted.

The City Council earlier this year rejected the latest version of Palm Terrace, citing visual and environmental impacts.

City officials are hoping they can come up with enough public funds to buy at least a portion of Palm Terrace and keep it as open space. They said the land could be used for hiking trails.

They acknowledge that reaching agreement as to how much the land is worth could be difficult. All purchases must be from willing sellers.