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City will protect Laguna

Editor: A recent writer criticized my comments and the City's handling of the release of apple wastewater from ponds adjacent to the Laguna. I would like to clarify a few points.

The Barlow Company is a vital part of Sebastopol's economic life. Our community needs the 65 year round jobs (110 during peak local season) and the wages and benefits they provide. Barlow's \$1.5 million annual payroll is spent locally with our merchants, doctors and dentists. The company also purchases supplies and services locally to run its operations.

As the last remaining apple processor in the City, Barlow has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade its apple wastewater disposal system. The company has more than demonstrated its commitment to safe disposal and to protection of the Laguna.

The rains earlier this month created a relatively minor overflow situation at the ponds. The "leaks" evidently were caused by gopher tunnels undetected until the high water levels and fast flows from the Laguna exposed them. The Sebastopol Public Works Department responded quickly to seal these holes and to minimize the release of apple wastewater. There was no threat to public health from these leaks.

The City and Barlow have worked for many years with the Water Quality Board and will continue to do so. We will meet very soon with the Board to discuss this episode and more importantly to explore measures to improve the integrity of the holding ponds. I am confident that the City and Barlow will continue to protect the Laguna and comply with State regulations.

Ken Foley, Mayor, Sebastopol