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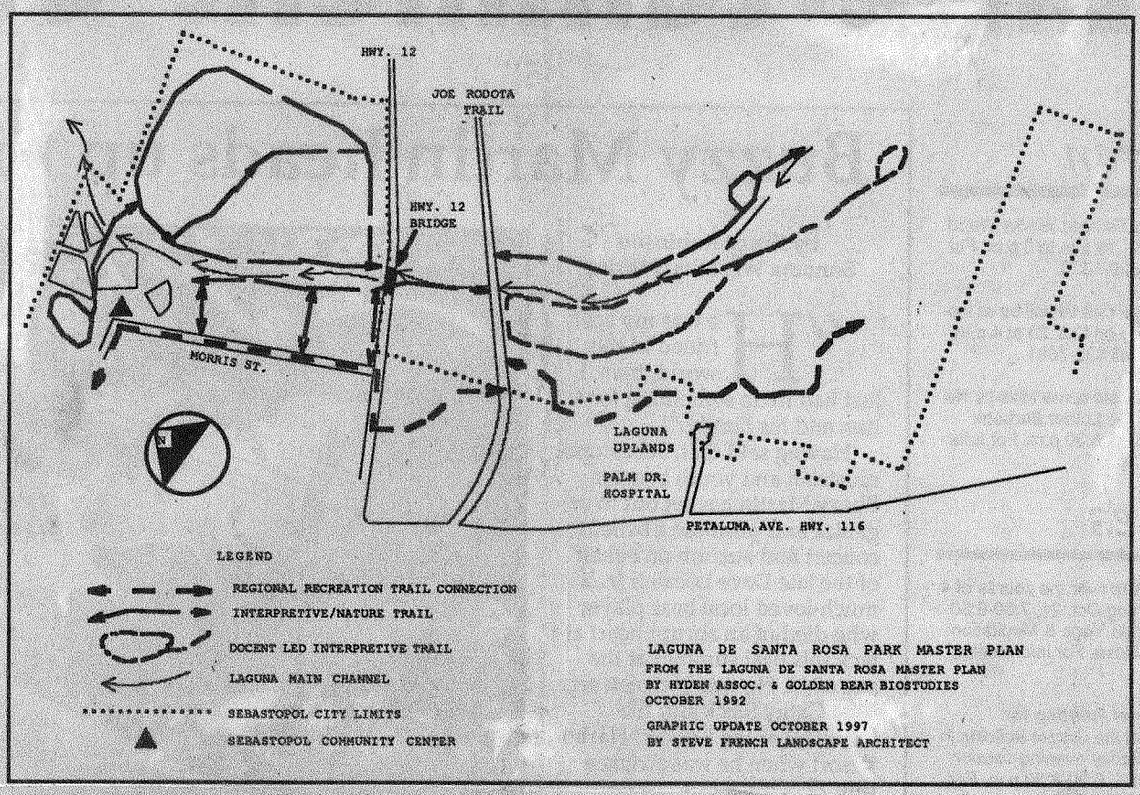
VIEWPOINT



COMMENTARY

97.11

Let's work together on Laguna Park plan

by Steve French

As a member of the City of Sebastopol's Laguna Park Implementation Committee I've been delighted to see so much dialogue about the proposed Laguna Park in this paper. I am concerned, though, about the debate between sports fields and park. This has never needed to be an either/or debate and there is no desire on the part of the Implementation Committee to create a polarized situation. I understand the difficulty of prioritizing funding between many worthwhile needs. I have two boys in the Gravenstein School District who enjoy active sports and I am a member of Sebastopol Kiwanis. Our club routinely donates funds to local sports organizations and supports these activities wholeheartedly.

I was disappointed by the City Council's decision on Sept. 16, but even more concerned that it was an all or nothing choice. Two councilmembers expressed a personal bias for "active" uses over "passive"and therefore voted for no funding. There was no opening to discuss the matter further, and it was too late at night anyway.

Two comments that night have stuck in my mind. One, made by Councilmember Foley was a point well taken. He said we (park advocates) should speak with "more of the players" involved with the Laguna. Since then I have spoken with interested citizens, the Laguna Foundation, the County Coalition for the Outdoor Recreation Plan and county officials. They, in turn, are speaking to the Department of Fish and Game, Open Space District people and others. We have found support for Laguna preservation and trails everywhere. There is the possibility of connecting the proposed Laguna Park trails to planned county trails so that in the future there could be as much as a 30-mile trail through the middle of Sonoma County. This is exciting!

The second memorable comment Sept. 16 was made by Steve Larsen, soccer league president, who said he supported the park and that "we should work together as partners to get what we all want." I thought that was a most civilized and inspiring comment and, of course, the right way to accomplish community goals. We all want an economically strong community that provides diverse recreational activities for children and adults. If we work together we can accomplish what we want. We have strong sports, arts and environmental community groups (in fact, much of the time they are the same people enjoying all these activities) and this mix makes the Sebastopol community rich.

I've created a small map of the Laguna Park Master Plan (see above). I hope it helps explain what and where the park is. It will be a system of trails running roughly from behind (to the east) of the Community Center to somewhere behind (to the east) of Palm Drive Hospital. In order to build trails, one needs a good biological study to identify sensitive areas and places that need revegetation. An archeological study must be made to show important sites and a survey needs to be made to measure the topography. Permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies must be obtained.

When this information is gathered and the permits acquired trails can be built that will give people access without disturbing or destroying important habitat or historical sites. This is what the Laguna Park Implementation Committee asked the City Council to fund.

You can see from the map that some of the proposed trails are in the Sebastopol City Limits and others are in the County. The Laguna Park will need the combined efforts of many groups inside and outside of Sebastopol to make Laguna preservation and improvement a reality.

I'm looking forward to working with the Sebastopol City Council, Sonoma County officials and all the interested people in this community to preserve and make access to the natural beauty of the Laguna floodplain; at least when I have time to volunteer.

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(Steve French is a Sebastopol landscape architect)