

# Bike-path spat simmers still

*Bicycle Paths*  
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The once-raging controversy over the Broadway-Brommer Street bike path apparently never died. It was only hibernating.

## SANTA CRUZ

That was clear Tuesday when 50 speakers swamped a City Council hearing on certifying an environmental-impact report for a proposed bike and pedestrian path that would cut through 63-acre Arana Gulch, a greenbelt area above Santa Cruz harbor.

The speakers were evenly split, with pro-path speakers calling the project an eco-friendly trail that would provide cyclists with a safe east-west route across the city, and foes calling it an environmental travesty that would waste taxpayer money.

The council, pressed for time, continued the hearing to an unspecified date. Certifying the EIR would be one step in a long approval process that would include hear-

ings before the state Coastal Commission.

The most common objection was the project would harm endangered tar plants that grow only in Santa Cruz County.

"We find it almost unbelievable the city is still considering developing this site when there are only nine (tar plant) populations in the world and all are under threat," said Vince Cheap of the Native Plant Society.

Pro-pathers said the project would keep bicyclists away from motorists as they travel from the Eastside to downtown. A few levied NIMBY accusations against the critics, and said the city, by following the EIR recommendations, would minimize impacts. Some proponents, stung by criticism the project would harm the land, called the project strongly pro-environment because it would encourage bicyclists to leave smog-producing cars behind.

"(Humans) are an endangered species," said Jessica Wolf, co-founder of People Power. "I worked hard against the last Gulf War.

We are culpable in our oil dependency."

The county Regional Transportation Commission has said the \$1.5 million in federal funds set aside for the project cannot be transferred to "alternative" proposals, including a cheaper one that avoids the gulch and connects to Frederick Street.

Mayor Emily Reilly said she wanted to make sure certifying the EIR didn't mean the council was absolutely committing to the project. Staff told her EIR certification was only one step in a long process.

It's easy to see why pro and con sides both love the gulch, the rolling strip of green wedged between the harbor and a neighborhood off Soquel Avenue. On Wednesday in the gulch, a hawk soared, a calico cat lazed and a young woman read a newspaper near her parked bike.

On clear days the gulch offers great views of the ocean on one side and the Santa Cruz Mountains on the other. Several hard-packed dirt paths snake through the property, but path proponents say they get wet

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and slick in rainstorms.

Backers hoped proposed changes to the original project such as narrower paths and bridges would mollify critics.

But many opponents compared the project to a horror movie monster that dies at the end, but comes back essentially unchanged in sequels.

"It keeps coming, like it's coming out of a swamp," opponent Carole DePalma said.

Among the other arguments offered by foes: the project would attract "vagrants" and waste the \$300,000 in local money that would supplement the \$1.5 million in federal funds. They also called the project a "luxury bike path with amenities," meant to please a small interest group "at a time when we're closing schools."

Several urged the council to certify the EIR, then step away from the project forever.

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