

# Sunny Cove residents win

## County orders drain study

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STAFF WRITER

Santa Cruz County Planning Commissioners last Wednesday night ordered a new study of drainage problems along Live Oak's 17th Avenue and rejected a project that would have emptied storm runoff into Bonita Lagoon and onto Sunny Cove, or Johan's, Beach.

In a 3-2 vote, the commission said the drainage project, designed to carry runoff from what used to be natural swamps along 17th Avenue, required a report that explored several different solutions to the problem.

The commission asked for an environmental report that would also include more detailed information about the eroding effects of runoff on Sunny Cove Beach and address the issue of who would pay for drainage solutions that could cost \$400,000 or more.

Members of the county public works department have 10 days to appeal the decision, but Mark Deming, of the county planning department, said such an appeal is unlikely.

Through its vote, the commission upheld an appeal by residents and property owners near the beach who feared a solution to the project recommended by county planners would seriously erode the sandy cove.

The project in question began as a 36-inch cement pipe emptying onto Sunny Cove Beach. It was designed by developers working for Volunteers of America (VOA), a non-profit group building a 76-unit, low-income housing project for senior citizens on 17th Avenue. Members of the County Public Works Department approved the system and VOA installed it in late 1984.

Such a project normally requires a separate coastal zone construction permit, which calls for public hearings and environmental review, said Linda Niebank, chief of current planning. But the Sunny Cove drainage system received no such scrutiny.

Residents noticed the pipe after it had been installed. They complained to the California Coastal Commission when runoff from light January rains cut a wide channel running several feet into the beach. Coastal commission officials ordered the pipe plugged and requested an environmental review of the system.

In April, the Board of Supervisors directed county planners to explore the cheapest of six proposed solutions to the problem.

Rogers E. Johnson Associates engineers were hired to analyze

the environmental effects of the solution selected by the board. They reported that given \$90,000 in improvements, the pipe would not seriously harm the beach.

County planners agreed and officially declared the improved system would have no significant environmental effects.

The environmental review would have ended with the planning department decision, but people concerned about the cove disagreed and appealed the findings.

They asked the Planning Commission to reject the recommended improvements to the existing system and request the more detailed and complete study of the problem.

At last Wednesday's meeting, county planners repeated their stance. They explained that the housing project, and an adjoining development that would also use the pipe, is covering one of the last open areas in the marsh that used to drain into Bonita Lagoon, west of Sunny Cove.

Developments along East Cliff Drive and 17th Avenue, such as the East Cliff Shopping Center, have blocked natural drainage channels and caused flooding, said county planner Pete Parkinson.

The new developments called for some kind of drainage system; county planners said the recommended improvements to the current system, such as channeling most of the runoff through an additional pipe to Bonita Lagoon, moving the existing pipe 40 feet off the beach, installing grease and silt traps to control pollution, building a six-foot, by six-foot, by four-foot spilling basin at the pipe's mouth and placing rocks over it, would reduce any harm.

"We are able to make the finding that any impacts of the project could be adequately mitigated," Sue Williamson, an environmental planner for the county, told the board.

She reminded the board that the neighbors had not presented any new technical information about the system that would warrant studying it again.

"We disagree that the project will not have significant impact on the Sunny Cove basin," Curt Stafford, secretary-treasurer of the Sunny Cove Assn., said. "We think there are ways to have no impacts and we want the county to evaluate them."

Ed Flavell, of the East Cliff Drive Property Owners Assn., said the environmental review projected how fast and how

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