

La Selva residents lose appeal on exercise course

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MARINA DEL REY — The California Coastal Commission Wednesday refused to overturn Santa Cruz County's approval of a controversial exercise course in La Selva Beach.

The commission voted 10-2 not to take jurisdiction in the appeal, which was filed by area residents.

The denial could mark the final episode in the two-year battle which has gone on for nearly two years between residents of Asta and Arbolado drives in La Selva Beach and the Recreation Board there.

The board is proposing the 20-station, 26-sign exercise course for a narrow strip of land between the two residential streets.

However, Arbolado Drive resident Ed Meagher — who filed the unsuccessful appeal — said afterward "it is not out of the question" that he'll file a lawsuit over the issue.

Recreation Board Director Peter Stanger, who traveled to Marina del Rey on the part of the district, added that he "wouldn't be surprised" to see a lawsuit filed.

Stanger said he was disappointed Meagher spent so much energy on the issue "when he could have spent it on constructive causes."

State coastal commissioners declined to take jurisdiction in the matter, leaving the county permit for the exercise course intact. Essentially, commissioners said it was a local matter that was dealt with on the local level.

Meagher based his appeal on two grounds — that on-site parking and traffic circulation was not consistent with the Local Coastal Program, and that the county's associated rezoning of the parcel from residential to

recreational use was inconsistent with the required findings.

Stanger testified there was sufficient off-street parking, noting room along the right-of-way of Asta and Arbolado, adjacent where the course will be. He said there were another 60 or so spaces in a nearby district-owned lot behind the La Selva Beach Clubhouse.

"La Selva Beach is such a small, close-knit community, most exercise course users will probably walk to it anyway," he added.

Stanger also said the rezoning issue was heard and approved by the county.

Meagher, as he had done before county supervisors, testified that the rezoning issue had never been properly addressed by the county. He also presented photos of the course where the illegally installed exercise equipment once had stood.

The Recreation District mistakenly installed the course without proper permits and within the county right-of-way in July 1985. It has since been dismantled, pending the issuance of a permit.

Recreation directors have said they only want to make better public use out of the land that they've owned and maintained — since 1959. Residents argued that the exercise equipment was aesthetically displeasing, that it lowered property values and opened the district to liability problems.

If Meagher decides not to pursue a lawsuit, the Recreation District is prepared to proceed with the course's installation.

Recreation District Chairman Linda Bourgaize said a landscape plan still must be approved by the county. She hopes the course and the landscaping could be installed by the end of August, providing time for plants to get established before winter rains arrive.