

Planning Commission takes up seawall

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Capitola Planning Commission hears public discussion tonight on a 1,257-foot-long, 25-foot high seawall proposed for this Depot Hill cliff between Central and Livermore avenues, which is eroding at the rate of 1 foot per year.

Depot Hill property owners would fund project; some geologists oppose meddling

By RAMONA TURNER
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CAPITOLA — A proposed seawall project that would protect the base of Depot Hill from erosion could move forward tonight, although some scientists strongly oppose the project.

During the city Planning Commission's 7 p.m. meeting, the Depot Hill Geological Hazard Abatement District, which is made up of 18 property owners there, will ask the commission to approve a 1,257-foot-long, 25-foot-tall manufactured seawall designed to look like the natural cliff face.

The \$2 million dollar project, to be funded by the property owners, aims to protect public sewer lines and private homes from erosion for 75 years. Without the seawall, project supporters say the sewer lines would be lost in 10 to 15 years and oceanfront homes would be threatened in about 35 years as the cliff continues its 1-foot-per-year retreat.

"We're hoping they mitigate this for the best for everybody, not just for the property owners who are willing to pick up the ticket," said Robert Tomaselli, a Depot Hill property owner.

But members of the scien-



Erosion has claimed much of Grand Avenue on Depot Hill.

tific community contend a seawall could cause more problems than it solves.

Ray Joesten, professor and acting director of the University of Connecticut's geology and geophysics program, said he's used Capitola as an example "of how human interven-

tion to stabilize eroding shorelines makes coastal erosion worse.

"Accelerated erosion beneath the apartments on the cliff started when the (Small Craft) harbor went in," said

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Joesten, a Mountain View native who studied the base of Depot Hill in the 1950s and '60s.

According to Joesten, any effort to trap sand or slow erosion actually either accelerates the problem or moves it somewhere else. Joesten is among some 300 people worldwide, including scientists and conservation groups, who've signed an online petition against the proposed seawall.

While Joesten believes a seawall disrupts the natural erosion process, Dr. Ian Slipper of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at England's University of Greenwich told the Sentinel via e-mail that a seawall would cover up sea creature fossils that date millions of years.

"The natural heritage which is available at Capitola has an incredible wealth of information

and can help mankind understand how insignificant he is in the grand scheme," he wrote. "It is arrogance in the extreme to believe that by building a seawall one can tame nature, and thus deprive a generation of an educational facility."

Meanwhile, the abatement district tonight may present a pro-seawall petition bearing more than 100 signatures. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the City Council Chamber, 420 Capitola Ave. It also will be simulcast on Charter Communications Channel 8.

If the city Planning Commission and City Council sign off on the proposal, the California Coastal Commission could consider it next year.

To learn more about the project, visit www.depothill.com. To view the anti-seawall petition, visit www.PetitionOnline.com/capitola/petition.html.

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