

Greenbelt purchase by city proposed

Development plan advances
as ballot measure is mulled

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SANTA CRUZ — Council members decided early Wednesday morning to consider seeking voter approval for a parcel tax to buy the 246-acre Bombay property on the western edge of town.

The decision came on the heels of a vote to endorse a Bombay Corp. proposal to send to city planners a plan to develop 25 homes on the southeast portion of the greenbelt parcel.

The disparate votes make sense in that the council hopes the required two-thirds of city voters would support a measure that would raise as much as \$5 million to buy and maintain the Bombay parcel if it is placed on the June ballot.

If they don't, then the council wants to ensure that the property owners haven't been stalled in their efforts to win city approval for the preferred 25-unit housing development.

Bombay Corp. representatives had agreed earlier in the meeting to maintain their willingness to sell the property through May, but that deadline may be extended given the council's decision to consider going to the voters for money to buy the land.

Staff members will return to the council with a specific ballot proposal, or other concrete ideas on how to buy the Bombay land.

The council made clear that they would welcome help from public and private organizations to raise

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money to buy the property in the coming months. If that happens, then voter support wouldn't be needed.

Dozens of residents turned out to talk to the council about the Bombay proposal, and the vast majority were adamant in their belief that the best course would be to preserve the entire greenbelt.

"There is no greater health-care plan for the city ... than protecting our natural environment," said Jeff Ringold, a former member of the city Planning Commission. "We'll never allow the blade of power and privilege to come and sever the bonds of the community."

Former UC Santa Cruz student leader Brant Smith reminded the council that residents have spoken in a clear, united voice that they consider preserving the remaining greenbelt a high priority.

"Don't deal with the devil," said

Smith. "The devil won't get his hell on a hill."

But the majority of council members were not swayed by the comments because they failed to offer adequate insight into how best to accomplish what everyone agreed was a common goal: protecting the greenbelt.

Absent a recommendation from the council to the Bombay Corp. on which development option to submit to the planning process, said Councilman Mike Rotkin, Bombay might be able to build seven large ranch-style homes throughout the greenbelt land.

If that happens, then none of the land would be under public control, and would be subject to future development pressure.

If the 25-unit clustered option endorsed by the council is approved after the environmental process, the Bombay Corp. would deed some 200 acres to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to be held in

public trust.

Vice Mayor Celia Scott begged the council not to endorse the 25-unit proposal because she feared it closed the door on any effort to protect the entire greenbelt. She pointed out that the majority of people who contacted the council supported full protection of the land.

But Councilman Scott Kennedy said he believed most people didn't understand the constraints placed on the council to allow legitimate development while trying to protect a large chunk of the greenbelt.

Councilman Michael Hernandez also rejected using city money to buy the greenbelt, noting that he had other priorities for the money. He believed saving a portion of the land for public ownership was better than nothing at all.

"Because we don't get the whole pie and just get 95 percent of it, I think it will still taste pretty good," said Hernandez.