

City planners no longer entangled in tarweed issue

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The sticky issue of Santa Cruz Tarweed is finally over for city planning commissioners.

Tying up a number of loose procedural ends, commissioners last night completed a process that began for them last July 5. The issue involved an 8.9 acre housing subdivision behind the Starlite drive-in theater which environmentalists say would wipe out a "rare and endangered" species of tarweed.

The planning commission had approved a tentative map for the subdivision in July, but in August the issue was referred back to the board after City Attorney Don Haile ruled that it had not followed proper procedures. The improper method of okaying the subdivision had been pointed out by Sierra Club member Dave Bockman, who had come to a city council meeting along with a number of other environmentalists to defend the right of the tarweed to survive.

In approving conditions on the subdivision last night, commissioners told developers that they must allow botanists to go onto the site to collect seeds, which would be used to transplant the tarweed. But according to Rex Palmer, a graduate student at the University of California at Davis, chances of a successful transplant are dubious.

Another major issue that had arisen during discussion of the subdivision was the problem of overcrowded schools.

The school district has said it doesn't like the idea of building any more houses in that part of Watsonville because of the overcrowding at E. A. Hall School.

But commissioners decided in effect last night to tell the school district that the overcrowding was the district's problem, not the city's. In a document outlining "environmental mitigations," the planners said: "All mitigation alternatives listed under environmental findings are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Pajaro Unified School District, another public agency, and any such changes as may be deemed appropriate can and should be adopted by the school district."

In discussing the issue of overcrowded schools, commissioners had agreed that it

would be unfair to impose conditions (such as a school impact tax) on one developer that had not been imposed on others.

Approval of the subdivision, which would consist of 21 fourplexes, must now be given by the city council.