

# Santa Cruz willing to swap sewer hookup for Skypark

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Faced with a looming shortage of sewage treatment capacity, the city of Scotts Valley has been considering two options — either expand its own treatment plant or make a deal to send city waste to Santa Cruz's soon-to-be-upgraded treatment plant. Sending the sewage to Santa Cruz has been pursued as the more economical option.

But Santa Cruz owns a big chunk of prime downtown property in Scotts Valley, and according to Scotts Valley officials, Santa Cruz officials have given them an ultimatum — let us develop Skypark or forget sending your effluent to Santa Cruz.

Santa Cruz owns the abandoned Skypark airport, 46 acres of a now unused 84-acre site in the middle of Scotts Valley's Mount Hermon Road commercial district. Santa Cruz wants to make as much money as possible by developing the site, but Scotts Valley has

earmarked 20 acres of Santa Cruz's holdings as a city park.

According to Scotts Valley Public Works Director Bob Rockett, Santa Cruz Public Works Director Larry Erwin told him in June that the Santa Cruz City Council would not consider treating Scotts Valley's wastewater until the issue of what to do with Skypark is resolved. Erwin could not be contacted to comment on Rockett's statement.

But Santa Cruz's reluctance to consider the sewer question may end up irrelevant. The Environmental Protection Agency recently notified Scotts Valley that it would not look kindly on allowing the city to send its sewage to a treatment plant with lower standards than the one they presently have.

Scotts Valley now treats its wastewater to a higher standard than Santa Cruz does. If the cities were to consolidate their sewer systems, the EPA warned that it would ask Scotts Valley to pay back all of

the grant money it has received over the years to improve its sewage treatment — some \$12 to \$13 million, Rockett said.

The required payback will kill the consolidation plan unless the EPA changes its mind, Rockett said. The city is still negotiating with the EPA, according to City Administrator August Caires. The city is also facing a September deadline to cut a deal with Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz will begin designing its new sewage facility in September, and unless the plant is initially designed to handle the extra load of Scotts Valley's waste, the costs of a later redesign would be prohibitive.

Because of the rapid buildup of Scotts Valley, the city is fast running short of capacity in its sewage treatment plant. Several interim improvements intended to stretch the plant's capacity are in the works, but a major remodeling will be needed to handle the city's projected sewer needs as the city reaches its limits.