

AIRPORTS

✓ Sky Park talks alive after EPA decision

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Negotiations over development of the abandoned Sky Park Airport are continuing, even though the two sides are still far apart.

And a recent decision by the Environmental Protection Agency turning down Scotts Valley's plans to build a sewage pipeline to Santa Cruz's treatment plant — once seen as a bargaining chip for Santa Cruz in negotiations over Sky Park — will not affect talks, said Scotts Valley City Administrator August Caires.

The city of Santa Cruz owns 46 acres of the closed airport, which lies in the middle of Scotts Valley's busy Mount Hermon Road com-

mercial district. Scotts Valley wants 20 acres of Santa Cruz's land to build a city park, but Santa Cruz wants to develop its land for maximum profit — which probably means building single-family homes.

It's an uncomfortable situation for Santa Cruz, which is known for its slow-growth policies and hundreds of acres of "greenbelt" land around the city.

"Santa Cruz is in a strange position, frankly," said Santa Cruz City Councilman Joe Ghio, a member of the city's negotiating team. "We're playing the role of a developer now, and we're usually on the other side. We'd love to do something with the property, but we've been astonished at the demands Scotts Valley is making.

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— Joe Ghio, Santa Cruz councilman

"They want 20 acres of prime land for a park," he said. "We've never asked that from a developer. It's quite an education to be on this side of the fence."

The Sky Park property is incorporated within the city limits of Santa Cruz, giving Santa Cruz the right to zone the land for future development. But in reality, no development can take place without the cooperation of Scotts Valley,

which must provide roads and services to the project.

In the past, several different development ideas have been discussed for the site, Ghio said.

"In the beginning, economic consultants indicated that research and development (industrial) parks were in demand," Ghio said. "But that (opportunity is) gone. Commercial space is no longer needed

in Scotts Valley ... and at this point the most viable use is for single-family residential."

Santa Cruz has received proposals from several real estate developers interested in taking on the Sky Park project, Ghio said, and the Santa Cruz City Council will meet in closed session Sept. 12 to discuss some of those offers.

Until recently, Scotts Valley hoped to expand its sewer capacity by building a pipeline to Santa Cruz's planned new sewage treatment plant instead of expanding its own treatment plant. The sewer issue was seen as part of the Sky Park negotiations until the proposal was shot down by the Environmental Protection Agency.

But rather than stalling negotiations, the EPA decision has "uncomplicated things a bit" by narrowing the options, said Scotts Valley's Caires.

"We need to weigh the interests of both cities," Caires said. "We want a park at that location, and we want the area to be included in our redevelopment project area."

Scotts Valley stands to gain tax benefits if the area is included in the redevelopment area boundaries before any improvements take place on the land.

"We're making progress," Caires said.

"We want this resolved as soon as we can," Ghio said. "It has no value to us just sitting there."