

Soquel Creek flood warning system expected to be installed this winter

CAPITOLA — The long-discussed early warning flood system along Soquel Creek is expected to be installed this winter, although formal flood warnings will not be issued until the following winter.

County Environmental Planner Tom Burns said the \$18,000 radio-telemetry system will eventually give mid-county residents a full hour of warning before a flood.

The National Weather Service, in charge of installation, will use this winter to "fine tune" the system by checking stream flows and other patterns. Burns said they are "hesitant" about issuing flood warnings until all adjustments are made.

The Capitola City Council Thursday night became the first local governmental agency to approve funding for the project. Councilmembers approved \$3,000 as their one-sixth share.

The county Board of Supervisors will be paying the \$15,000 balance. Supervisors will be considering it for approval on Aug. 14, according to Burns.

Capitola's approval didn't come smoothly. Councilman Dennis Beltram voted against the expenditure, criticizing the county's proposed agreement the city had signed.

Beltram was particularly upset about a requirement that the city carry liability insurance if the flood-warning system doesn't work. The agreement included a so-called "hold-harmless" clause. Beltram questioned whether or not the system would work.

City Attorney Richard Manning, who worked with the county on the agreement, replied the county wasn't making any promises. "We should know up-front that the system is fallible. But, it is better than nothing," he said.

Other councilmembers agreed, in vot-

ing to move forward on the project.

Councilman Jerry Clarke called the flood-warning system a "critical element" for the city. "We would certainly be remiss if we didn't approve it," he said.

Although most of Soquel Creek — and all of the Soquel Creek Watershed — is located in the unincorporated part of the county, Capitola lies downstream and is susceptible to any flooding. A significant portion of the city is situated within the Soquel Creek flood plain, including all of Capitola Village.

Much of Soquel Village, upstream from Capitola and a part of the unincorporated area of the county,— was flooded in the Storm of '82. A logjam on Soquel Creek diverted waters through downtown Soquel. If not for that logjam, Capitola easily could have been flooded.

The flood-warning system works with oscillating "tip buckets." When each is full it tips over, emitting a radio signal that goes to a computer. The computer registers the information on a model that can predict when a flood will occur.

The system was recommended as part of the Soquel Creek Storm Damage Recovery Plan provided by the federal Soils Conservation Service.