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Limit on SV growth sparks council debate

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SCOTTS VALLEY — A proposal to limit the population of Scotts Valley to 12,500 by the year 2005 sparked a fiery debate and charges of political posturing at the City Council meeting Wednesday, even though all five council members support the concept of a population cap.

But the debate petered out when Councilman Phil Liberty noted that the council had adopted a nearly-identical resolution in 1988.

The sparks began to fly when Councilman Joe Miller introduced a resolution to place the concept of a "population cap" into the preface of the city's General Plan. According to the plan's current preface, the city's current zoning will allow a population of 14,000 by the year 2005. Miller's preface would replace the reference to 14,000 residents with a reference to 12,500 residents, but would not change the zoning that ultimately determines population levels.

There are now about 9,000 residents in Scotts Valley. But the city's rapid rate of growth has become a major issue in the upcoming

City Council race.

"It's unfortunate for homeowners and developers alike to have a subtle, hidden goal," Miller said. "I propose to rewrite the preface of the General Plan to say we're desirous of placing a population cap on the city's General Plan."

Mayor Glennon Culwell and Liberty, both up for re-election in June, say the preface to the General Plan is wrong. They say the city's zoning will actually allow for a population of more than 20,000, and opposition to the ballooning of the city's population has become a major issue in their campaigns.

"It was known prior to adoption of the General Plan that it would allow in excess of 22,000 persons," Liberty said. "It was published in the newspaper. That's why I voted against (the plan), and I so stated at the time."

Miller, who is not up for re-election but supports the two opposition candidates, claims the population estimates in the General Plan are probably too high. He says the population estimates were drawn from a "flat map" of the city, not taking into consideration the steep slopes and poor soils that will fur-

ther limit development.

The population cap of 12,500 residents "may already be the situation" under current zoning, Miller said.

Liberty then reminded his colleagues that they had passed a nearly unanimous resolution in November 1988, directing city staff to study a population goal of 12,500 for the city's General Plan. Miller was taken aback, and asked why nothing had been done on the issue for two years. No one had an answer, but Councilman Michael Caffrey remembered the issue clearly. He was the only councilman to vote against it.

"I voted no at the time because I don't believe we can legislate the size of families," he said. "But I can appreciate (the 12,500 figure) as a goal."

City attorney Ray Haight told the council that a population 'cap' would not be legal for that very reason, but said establishing a 'goal' would be allowable.

The council compromised by asking city staff to study a population goal of 12,500 people and bringing the information back when hearings on new General Plan revisions begin later this year.