



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Walkers leave the Arana greenbelt Wednesday past a sign heralding the City Council's decision to preserve the area.

City won't sell Arana Gulch parcel

S.C. council votes to preserve 6-acre greenbelt

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SANTA CRUZ — Ignoring a recommendation from the city manager, the City Council voted Tuesday night to not sell a section of Arana Gulch to a private developer.

The 6-1 vote means the city has saved six acres from the north end of 63-acre Arana Gulch from the possibility of future development. The

council voted to keep the section in the greenbelt and count it in the gulch master plan currently underway.

Arana Gulch, a large meadow on the Eastside, was bought by the city in 1994 and is one of the few city-owned greenbelts in that part of town.

Councilman Tony Madrigal was the dissenting vote, preferring to find out what an environmental impact report would say about development on the site.

"The public needs to know what the EIR has to say," Madrigal said Wednesday. "It's worth finding out. This is what we always do before proceeding with any decision regarding land use."

City Manager Dick Wilson estimated an environmental impact report for the six acres would cost \$60,000.

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Opposing sides have fought for years over a proposed bike path paved across the gulch that connects the city's east and west sides. The six-acre section has created more controversy, adding to the ongoing debate.

City Council members in 1996 decided to exclude the section from the north end of the meadow while exploring possible revenue-raising ideas that included building new homes on the site.

The housing idea was dropped in 2000, but council members changed and the city budget took sharp hits during the next three years, causing the excluded six acres to again be considered for development.

In October 2003, the council unanimously agreed to keep the section "undesignated" while directing the Parks and Recreation Department to move forward with a management plan for the rest of Arana Gulch.

On Tuesday, instead of following Wilson's advice, the council listened to testimony from more than 20 residents opposed to development and agreed to leave the land alone.

"Selling city park land is not the way to raise revenue," Councilman Ed Porter said. "We cannot fix our problems by liquidating city land. Selling off our assets is not sustainable."

Councilwoman Emily Reilly, who was mayor in 2003, said it was a wrong move by the previous council to have excluded the section of the meadow.

"It is important that we say emphatically that a bad idea does not become a good idea just because you need money," Reilly said.

Wilson's recommendation to the council stated, "We are not urging the immediate development of this property."

Still, his report cited the city's

"superabundance of park land" and the shortage of city staff to care for the land.

Assistant City Manager Martin Bernal said Wednesday that the greenbelt is a "source of pride," but there is no economic recovery in sight for the city, and selling the land was a possibility for padding coffers.

"We don't have the capacity to maintain what we've got, and we're falling farther and farther behind," Bernal said. "We need to adjust to live within our means or

plan for an increase in our base. We're just not sustainable."

Patricia Matejcek of the local chapter of the Sierra Club said the council's decision was "the only sensible thing to do. It's not even a question."

Karl Isacson, who lives near the gulch, suggested the council put the six-acre exclusion to a vote of city residents.

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