

# Trails plan hits dead end

## County dumps proposal to use private land for public trails

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SANTA CRUZ — A fiercely opposed plan for a countywide system of trails that would cross private property died Tuesday.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously drove three stakes through the heart of the plan described by Chairman Gary Patton as doomed by the "relentlessly negative" atmosphere surrounding it.

"The board had no choice," said Ben Angove, head of the county parks department, which oversaw the development of the plan by a citizens' group. "... There wasn't enough oxygen for it to live."

The board set two conditions before the proposed trail plan could move forward and added a third directive that could wipe out three years of work by the citizens' committee.

The board's action also canceled a proposed series of public workshops to discuss the plan to link the county's recreational areas and parks.

Nothing more will happen to the plan until the following occurs:

- The county adopts its new General Plan, expected in the coming weeks;

- The parks staff analyzes the trail proposal, looking at its budget, legal and other implications. Such an analysis, however, will not be made unless parks officials ask for money to fund it during the county's June budget hear-

ings.

Angove said after the hearing he has no plans to do so.

"I'm not bringing it back," he said. "It's dead for now."

A third directive was added by Patton. He told the county Planning Department to remove all references to the proposed routes from the county's computerized mapping systems.

The trails plan was described by its proponents as a "linear park" that would connect recreational areas throughout the county, allowing residents to move easily among them.

Patton's directive was aimed at complaints fielded from real estate agents.

They told the board that the trails plan clouded the title of properties up

for sale. At least one 80-acre deal in the Summit area was on the point of falling apart, said one, because a trail was proposed through the middle of it.

Planner Mark Deming said the part of the computerized mapping system that shows the proposed trail routes on it will be removed and the information stored on a computer disk and locked in a safe.

Angove said that storing the information would violate the board's directive to get rid of it.

None of the 100 or so people assembled in the board's fifth floor meeting room said they opposed trails per se.

Many objected to the proposed pro-

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cess of "exacting" the trail easements, referring to it in their literature as "extortion." The exaction process would require property owners to dedicate trail routes to the county before they would be allowed to develop their land.

Other opponents worried about environmental destruction, liability, and the prospect of having hikers, bicyclists and equestrians trekking through their backyards.

"When I came back from the Pacific in '45, I treasured the tranquility at my place and I still do," said William Osterberg, who said his end-of-the-road Bonny Doon property had been earmarked for a trail running up his driveway and between his garage and woodshed.

The trails advisory committee worked in relative obscurity for more than two years.

In recent months, however, a citizens' group formed to oppose the plan and eventually gathered more than 1,800 signatures against it.

Members of Citizens for Responsible Land Use complained that they could not find out whether their properties would be on the trail routes.

The trails committee was reluctant to release preliminary maps, fearing they would fall into the hands of people who would head out to use the trails before they were approved.

The effect, however, was to further infuriate residents, who feared the county was plotting in secret to take their property.

"I'm sorry to say this. I really am," said Summit resident Charles Norman to the supervisors. "But we really don't have much faith in your being honest with us."

Board members said they regret that such a well-intentioned effort spun so badly out of control.

The positive side of such a trail system has been overshadowed by the "relentlessly negative" response, said Patton.

In that atmosphere, he said, "it is very difficult to move to something positive."

Nevertheless, he said that the trails plan

has been a part of the county's long-range plans for more than 20 years because it is a good one.

"I continue to believe, deep in my heart, there has got to be a way to do it," Patton said, adding, "this is not the time to go out to the public process." Nearly all of the speakers in the board's 3½-hour session on the trails plan spoke against it.

A poignant note was struck by Ken McCrary, of the prominent North Coast family, whose mother was a leading member of the Trails Advisory Committee.

Ken McCrary, however, spoke as a member of Citizens for Responsible Land Use, which opposed the plan.

"It's a real victory," he said afterward. The group will press forward to remove references to the trails plan in the county's General Plan, he said, and to reverse previous county actions that required trails of property owners.

One such action led a trail right up to the garden wall of the house of he said.

McCrary's mother, Emma McCrary, said she supports her son but was disappointed at the fruit of her work. The committee's work was intended only as a place to begin the community discussion, she said.

But at some point, she said, those against the plan just stopped listening.

"It's really too bad," she said afterward. Her North Coast family property is laced with dozens of trails. The county will continue to grow, she said, and so will the need for trails.

"We need to think of the future," she said. "... It's nice to think you can keep everyone out. ... But they will come."

A Ben Lomond woman showed up to speak in favor of the plan, but arrived after the decision was made.

Leaving in the elevator, she said she was sorry to lose a trail system like the one in nearby Woodside, as well as in several European countries.

In Europe, she said, extensive trail systems allow average citizens to enjoy the beauty of their land.