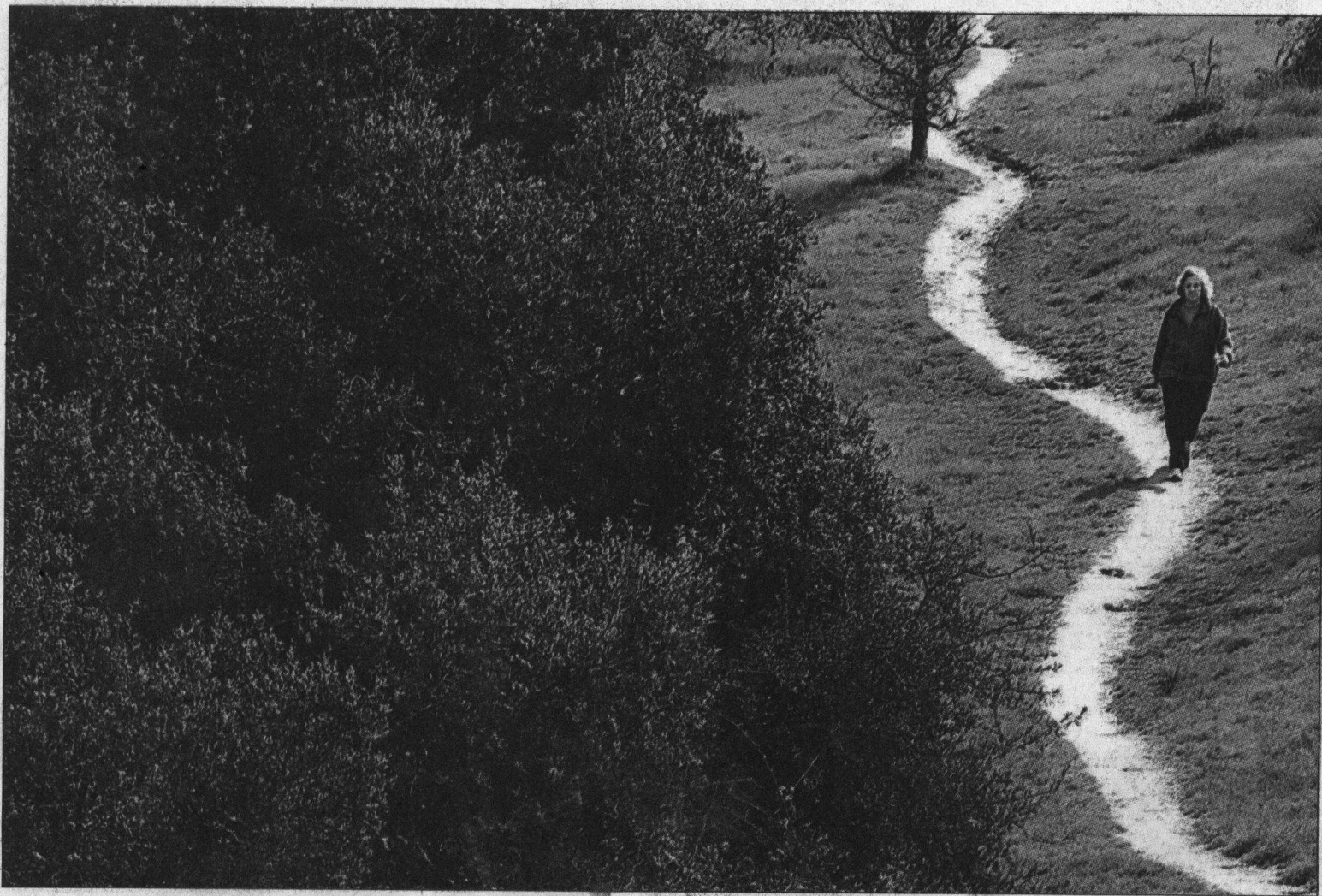


*'It's a wonderful way to encourage people not to drive sometimes.'*

MIKE ERBE, LIVE OAK RESIDENT

# Arana plan set for community input



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Arana Gulch neighbor Caryle Hirshberg takes advantage of one of her neighborhood greenbelt paths during a morning walk Friday.

## Public meeting scheduled to air concerns over development of gulch

By SHANNA McCORD  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The future of Arana Gulch — the 67-acre meadow on the city's eastern edge — has environmentalists at odds about how to protect the native plants and rugged landscape while also allowing better recreation on the greenbelt.

Both sides can sound off on the environmental impacts of the master plan for Arana Gulch on Tuesday. That's when a joint meeting of the City Council and city Parks and Recreation

### If You Go

**WHAT:** City Council and Parks and Recreation Commission public hearing.

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Tuesday.

**WHERE:** City Council Chamber, 809 Center St., Santa Cruz.

Commission — a group that oversees decisions made by the Parks and Recreation Department — will take place, as city leaders seek input on the plan's draft environmental impact report.

A plan for a quarter-mile long paved path through the gulch is one of the biggest sticking points.

"It's not a trail or a path, it's a road," said Jean Brocklebank, a resident of nearby 7th Avenue. "It was originally envisioned as a high-speed bicycle commuter connection, but now it's morphed into a multiuse interpretive trail. Of course, there's no difference."

The city bought the land in 1994. It sits between the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor and Agnes

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## Arana

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Street to the north.

Plans for the meadow, in the works for at least 10 years, call for the paved path that links Broadway with Brommer Street and includes a 330-foot long suspension bridge spanning Hagemann Gulch.

The bridge would open a west entrance to the gulch on Frederick Street, making it easier for residents to access the area. A previous proposal for a bridge over Arana Gulch Creek was dropped to save money and strike a compromise with people who thought two bridges were too much.

The Arana Gulch master plan also sets out better ways to take care of the declining tar plant — a state and federally protected daisy-like flower with black dots in the middle.

"The attempt to balance public access and resource protection is always the challenge," said Susan Harris, a Parks and Rec staffer and an author of the Arana Gulch draft master plan.

The idea for a paved path is to make it easier for people to get across town by biking, walking or using a wheelchair across the

meadow, Harris said.

While bicycle enthusiasts say such a path would encourage more people to bike and allow cyclists to avoid busy streets, opponents, including Brocklebank, say a paved path through the middle of the land would ruin the pristine atmosphere of Arana Gulch and put the native tar plant in further jeopardy.

Mike Erbe, a Live Oak resident who often bikes to his job at Plantronics in the city's Harvey West business park, believes the paved path would make his commute easier and allow people on the city's Westside to bike to places such as the Capitola Mall, Orchard Supply Hardware and Simpkins Family Swim Center.

"It's a wonderful way to encourage people not to drive sometimes," said Erbe, 50. "Plus, with child obesity becoming an epidemic, a paved trail is a nice way to encourage families to get out with their kids."

The draft environmental impact report cites the tar plant's seed bank as the only "significant unavoidable" problem. Although the proposed Broadway-Brommer Street trail avoids the most recent tar plant populations, the seed bank of historic tar plants may still remain.

The council, at a later date,



Arana Gulch affords a hiker a stroll in nature within the confines of the city Friday.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

A proposal to exclude six acres from the Arana Gulch master plan, and allow the city to possibly sell the land in the future, was nixed by the council in September after mounting public criticism.

The state Coastal Commission has the final say on the Arana Gulch master plan.

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would have to make findings of "overriding consideration" to allow the paved trail to go forward.

The Parks and Recreation Department also has alternative plans for the gulch that don't include a bridge or paved path.

But, they say, there's a major trade-off.

"Then the trade-off is it's not as accessible from the Seabright neighborhood," Harris said. "And it's not as accessible for people with disabilities. That's a City Council decision."