

MASTER PLAN

Coastal panel staff back Arana Gulch plan

Greenbelt

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City, opponents to square off during Dec. 8 Coastal Commission hearing in San Francisco

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SANTA CRUZ — With just a few tweaks, staff of the state Coastal Commission have recommended approval of the city's Arana Gulch Master Plan next month.

Planner Susan Craig issued a report Friday, calling the proposal a "win-win" that supports habitat restoration aimed

at the endangered Santa Cruz tarplant and proposes paved multiuse trails designed to improve access and education. She noted the trails create a new bicycle and pedestrian link between the Eastside and Live Oak by connecting Broadway with Brommer Street.

"Improved management of such public use not only will better protect the habitat, but will also allow for enhanced interpretive access opportunities, partic-

ularly for user groups that are currently underserved in this respect," Craig wrote, noting that existing dirt trails in the 68-acre park are difficult for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers.

Craig has recommended relocating a paved trail coming from the Agnes Street entrance to the park, abandon all paths not approved as part of the trail system

SEE ARANA ON B3



Chaminade is visible at top as a man runs with his dog in Arana Gulch on Monday.

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SENTINEL

ARANA

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and clearly identify all segments. The city says it can meet those suggestions.

Charlie Dixon of Santa Cruz, who supports the plan because of its benefits for seniors and the disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act, plans to attend the commission hearing set for Dec. 8 in San Francisco.

"There are no ADA accessible compliant trails in any of (the city's) four greenbelts," he said, adding that the park's proximity to senior facilities make it "really the greenbelt for ADA trails."

The central question before commissioners—who must rule on the plan because it requires a coastal permit—is whether the city can pave trails through an environmentally sensitive area. To overcome that issue, the city must demonstrate the trails are "resource dependent," or critical to being there for education or other purposes.

The report notes the city has "significantly reduced" the project during the past 16 years, from a route for commuter bicyclists to an interpretive trail system focused on restoration. In all, there would be 2,250 feet of paved pathways 8 feet wide with a 2-foot shoulder, in addition to some unpaved trails.

But opponents argue the city can restore the site without paved trails.

The commission tabled the plan in March 2010 after opposition from the Friends of Arana Gulch, California Native Plant Society and others. The city agreed to move paved trails outside main tarplant sections, expand cattle grazing areas and use a more porous trail material, but the plan failed on a 5-5 vote in October 2010.

To address lingering concerns, the city changed the alignment of two unpaved trails, has arranged for docent led tours and set aside half of the funding from the future sale of an adjacent city property to tarplant management.

Dannettee Shoemaker, head of the parks and recreation division, said she doesn't believe the city can implement the plan without the multiuse trails, grants for which provide 80 percent of funding for the overall plan.

"More so for me, removing that element really takes away an important part of this park master plan that we feel will invite and involve a wide spectrum of the community," she said.

Critics dismiss the claim that transportation grants are vital to funding the tarplant work.

Jean Brocklebank, a founder of Friends of Arana Gulch, said Monday, "The (commission's) staff report finally acknowledges that the Broadway Brommer bicycle route through Arana Gulch is indeed a transportation project that starts and ends outside the greenbelt boundary and is designed to go through, not to, the greenbelt."

The report notes that tarplants in the former dairy site have dropped from 100,000 in the 1980s to 32 this year. The report cites the end of grazing, invasive species and "unmanaged public access" that led to unauthorized trails.