

Exercise-course standoff remains

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SANTA CRUZ — A postponement that didn't please anybody resulted from a four-hour-plus public hearing Wednesday by the county Planning Commission on the controversial La Selva Beach exercise course.

Commissioners, while leaning toward cutting the 20-stop, 26-sign exercise course in half, postponed the hearing to Jan. 14.

They urged the divided sides — the La Selva Beach Recreation District Board, which installed the course 1½ years ago without county permits and Asta/Arbolado drive residents who live adjacent to the course — to work out a compromise.

Contacted by The Sentinel afterward, however, neither side held out hope for a compromise.

"I wish the commission had chosen to find a mediator," said Pete Stanger, a Recreation District director. "We've gone through this all before. Basically, they (the resi-

dents) say the only way we can appease them is to do away with the course."

Asta Drive resident Ed Meagher replied, "If participants consist of present (recreation) board members and us, I hold no hope of compromise. There is no reasonable way of communicating with these people."

It was Meagher who appealed the county zoning administrator's approval of the course to the Planning Commission for the grassroots group, Friends of Asta/Arbolado.

Those residents, testifying for the second time in as many months before the commission, object to the course being installed in the narrow, tree-shaded strip between their two residential roads.

The strip has been owned — and maintained — by the Recreation District since 1959. Board members say the course simply puts the open space to public use.

Asta/Arbolado residents countered with a stream of arguments —

from the unsightliness of the signs and exercise equipment to safety and liability dangers. Also, the course lowers the value of their homes they said. Some even mentioned the possibility of rare plants and animals being endangered or the disturbance of possible Ohlone Indian burial grounds.

"They (the Recreation Board) literally jammed this thing down our throats," testified Arbolado resident Jim Van Houten. "The very worthwhile use of the land is maintaining it as passive open space."

Commissioner Myrna Britton appeared to speak for her fellow commissioners when she told residents, "This is a piece of public property. For years, you may have looked upon it as an extension of your property but the Recreation Board has the right to use it."

Britton was joined by Commission Chairwoman Denise Holbert and Commissioner Frank Osmer in declaring the proposed course was too dense for the one-third-mile-long

stretch between the two streets. They discussed reducing the number of stations from 20 to 10, and the number of signs from 26 to 11.

"It's like trying to put a basketball court in your dining room," said Osmer. "There simply isn't enough room."

Still, commissioners weren't willing to force the reduction at this time. Discussion, however, did include a compromise proposal by Stanger that would have moved the course to the middle of the residential strip.

The exercise equipment and signs were originally installed along the outskirts of the strip, with some sitting within the public right-of-way. After the September hearing before the county zoning administrator, the Recreation Board was ordered to remove the course. The board complied.

The next public hearing will be heard at 1:30 p.m. Jan. 14 in the fifth floor supervisors' chamber at the County Center.