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City, coastal staff may part ways

Capitola's Local Coastal Program work program was approved Monday by the regional Coastal Commission.

Now needing only state commission approval, the plan outlines the work to be done by the Coastal Commission staff in preparing the city's coastal program under a rare agreement with the city of Capitola.

But Monday's approval may be for naught, since the Coastal Commission staff has been meeting with Capitola city officials, trying to persuade the city to pull out of the agreement and hire a private consultant to prepare the local Coastal Plan.

Capitola Mayor Michael

Routh and City Manager Max Kludt met with Coastal Commission Executive Director Ed Brown last Thursday to discuss the possibility.

There have been several stormy meetings in the past few months between city council members and the coastal commissioners over the city's present land use plans and what council members feel is a lack of concern or understanding by the commission of the city's land use policies and decisions.

Brown said Tuesday morning he raised the consultant issue with Routh and Kludt "because it seems the position the (Coastal Commis-

sion) staff is in is trying, on one hand, to be a consultant to the city on the Local Coastal Plan and, on the other hand, trying to provide an assessment of the proposed work program.

"Because we are a comparatively small staff, we are finding it difficult to wear two hats," Brown added. "Under the best of conditions, it is a very difficult set of circumstances to be in. Under worse conditions, it is impossible.

"During our public meetings, we sensed that there was a demonstrated fact that there was a lack of faith in the Coastal Commission staff.

"It seemed that we should explore the possibility of hiring an independent consultant," he concluded.

Routh quoted Brown as telling the city officials the commission was understaffed and overworked, and didn't have the time or the man-

power to handle the city's Local Coastal Program.

"Personally," said Routh, "I feel they got so much negative feedback on the Local Coastal Program that they don't want to do it now.

"I feel that if the city had reacted positively," added Routh, "there would not have been any problems."

One reason Capitola originally turned to the regional Coastal Commission to prepare its Local Coastal program was a quirk in the state Coastal Act that gave cities and counties the option of hiring a consultant to prepare the Program and have part of the costs reimbursed by the state, or turn the project over to the regional Coastal Commission, who would then have to pay all costs of preparing the plan.

The regional Coastal Commission has submitted a \$29,000-plus budget to the state Coastal Commission for the

Capitola Program.

Brown confirmed reports that he had offered that money to the city to hire its own consultant.

Routh said the offer was not accepted by him or Kludt. "We feel it would probably cost in the neighborhood of \$40,000 to hire a consultant."

Brown doesn't think the state Coastal Commission, which will act on the Capitola work program Oct. 31, will make more money available to the city.

"I rather doubt that more money would be available," he said Tuesday. "There is not an unlimited amount of money available statewide. And the city of Capitola is at the upper limit of the range we anticipated for it."

But if the city decided to hire a private consultant and not pay part of the cost out of its own pocket, there are a

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