

SANTA CRUZ

Residents challenging widening of bike path

Bicycle Paths

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Residents of an upscale coastal neighborhood are fighting the City Council's approval of a West Cliff Drive pedestrian and bike trail, a project they consider unsafe and a waste of money.

The critics will appeal the decision during today's City Council session at 3 p.m. If the city won't take back its approval, opponents may turn to the state Coastal Commission, which can overrule city and county decisions. The neighbors have discussed suing the city if this approach fails.

To widen the path, city workers would make part of West Cliff Drive narrower. Supporters say the widening will make the path safer and that studies show the narrowing of the drive wouldn't impede traffic flow along the drive.

Critics, however, say it would draw fast bicyclists onto a path meant for pedestrians and slow-moving bicyclists.

West Cliff resident Michael Tilson said a wider path would be a "bicycle superhighway" dangerous for pedestrians and pets.

"Polite cyclists who want to go fast use the road," he said. "But the road will be so narrow, it will barely support two cars passing each other."

Supporters say they need more room for in-line skating, walking and bicycling along the ocean.

"It's so crowded here, it's kind of unsafe," said Sharon Dowe, an Escalona Drive resident walking on West Cliff Drive on Monday. She said narrowing the road will slow traffic "and what a beautiful place to slow it down."

In late July, the City Council voted 6-1 to approve the \$900,000 plan to widen the 2.5-mile path between Bay Street and Swanton Boulevard. Work is set to begin this month. The project will be built mostly with state and federal money to expand the path from 8-to-12-feet wide to 14 feet.

Kathy Cummins, a 20-year West Cliff resident, said the plan will make it hard for cars to back out of driveways or even drive past each other if a mail truck is on the side of the road.

Also during the session, Councilman Mark Primack wants city staff to determine if there are lawful ways to keep a homeless camp, Camp Paradise, open temporarily.

The City Council will meet at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. today at 809 Center St., Council Chambers, Santa Cruz.

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