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Cowell Site Okayed For New School

By Jack Rannells

An 11-acre site on the Cowell estate property north of High street was approved by the city planning commission last night as a "reasonable alternate" for location of the proposed Westside elementary school.

Planning Director Robert Cook is drafting a resolution recommending approval for presentation at an adjourned session of the city council tonight, beginning at 6 o'clock.

The council Tuesday night gave conditional approval to linking of the proposed school with the Moore street sewer line.

Conditions include a provision that if the sewer system cannot adequately handle the increased load, the school district—at its own expense—will establish a sump holding tank to discharge sewage at low-use hours.

Also, the school would be required to join any future sewer assessment district in the High-Bay street area.

The Cowell site was described by Cook as "a reasonable alternate, but still second best" to the so-called reservoir site.

"Its desirability hinges somewhat on the future of the university here," Cook said.

City and chamber of commerce officials are attempting to garner for Santa Cruz a proposed central coast branch of the University of California. It is proposed for a portion of the Cowell property.

Cook said a school at the edge of its service area rather than in the center would result if the Cowell site is selected.

The planning commission has given top preference to a parcel below the Bay street reservoir. However, Thomas Turner, superintendent of city schools, has found owners of that and other proposed sites reluctant to sell.

He claims assurance from at least one member of the Henry Cowell foundation board that it would look favorably on sale of a total of 16 acres to the school district at market value. Only 11 acres would be used initially.

Cook said freedom of the Cowell site from excessive High street traffic noises would be strictly a function of development. "Landscaping and location of buildings can eliminate most problems," he said.

Councilman Paul Forgey quickly presented the motion placing financial responsibility for the sewer holding tank on the school district. The city previously had accepted the cost burden if such development is necessary at the reservoir site.

"The same people would be taxed," Forgey said. "Let's put the expense where it belongs."