

Board postpones decision on Sunny Cove problem

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A solution still awaits a particularly troublesome drainage problem in Live Oak involving a sheltered sandy cove, a shopping center and apartment houses.

The complicated puzzle came before Santa Cruz County supervisors Tuesday, but they postponed a decision to get more information on the issue, which has irked Live Oak residents for more than two years.

Drainage has been a problem in Live Oak ever since rampant development began paving over natural sumps and channels that used to carry storm runoff to the ocean. A particularly acute drainage problem developed at East Cliff Drive and 17th Avenue after a shopping center and numerous housing projects were developed near the intersection.

Things got worse when Volunteers of America Inc., a national company based in the Midwest, proposed building an apartment complex for senior citizens next to the shopping center.

Officials in the county Public Works Department approved a drainage system for the project that was also intended to solve some of the flooding problems on East Cliff Drive.

Unfortunately the plan — laying a 36-inch drainage pipe at the head of Sunny Cove, or Johan's, Beach — was not only unacceptable to the neighbors, but also illegal. The developer had installed the pipe without first securing the necessary permission from the California Coastal Commission.

The illegal construction set off a chain of events that has yet to end: The Coastal Commission red-tagged the project. The neighbors angrily protested

the drainage plan. The county Planning Commission ordered an environmental impact report on the issue. More than a year later, the environmental report concluded that with \$90,000 in modifications the pipe could remain without causing significant damage to the beach.

Neighbors challenged the adequacy of the report, which they called a transparent attempt to justify what had already taken place. Nonetheless, county Zoning Administrator Mark Deming accepted the conclusions of the report and approved a Coastal Zone permit for the project. The neighbors unsuccessfully appealed Deming's decision to the Planning Commission, then took their complaints to the Board of Supervisors.

On Tuesday, a number of angry neighbors told the supervisors that not only was the permanent solution recommended by the EIR unacceptable but the temporary solution threatened the health and safety of the neighborhood.

Part of the temporary solution involved digging a large detention basin on an undeveloped lot owned by developer Hal Shores at 17th and East Cliff. The neighbors complained that the 25,000-cubic-foot hole was a stagnant pool and mosquito breeding ground in the summer. When the unfenced hole filled with water in the winter it posed the danger of drowning for the children often seen playing there.

The speakers also attacked various deficiencies in the EIR, including inadequate study of the effects on the drainage runoff on the quality of the water in the cove.

Tom Mader, of the Santa Cruz Body Surfing Association, said 300 people regularly swim in

the popular local beach and that his association holds three to five contests a year at the cove.

Water quality was of great concern to the association, said Mader, because "unlike board surfing our sport requires total immersion."

He concluded, "We're not going to let you discharge water down there that's unsanitary, nor is the Coastal Commission."

Jan Beautz, the attorney for the Live Oak Community Association, asked for a solution that was more than just a band-aid. She said the people of Live Oak deserved the best solution, not the cheapest.

"I think all of us in Live Oak are tired of getting poor solutions to large problems," she said and criticized the county for allowing Volunteers of America, a multimillion-dollar national corporation, to build a substandard drainage system, then "walk away," leaving the people of Live Oak to live with the consequences.

Aptos-Soquel Supervisors Dan Forbus said he was tempted to deny the appeal and let the issue be decided in the courts. But at the suggestion of Santa Cruz-area Supervisor Gary Patton, the board put off the matter until county planners could provide them with more information.

Patton asked the planners to study the question of water quality in the cove and to provide him an estimate of the cost of a drainage solution that would prevent any storm runoff from coursing down the beach. He asked the planners to also estimate the share of the cost that would be charged Live Oak residents, if they were asked to help pay for a more expensive solution.