

A high-tech showdown

UCSC proposal frustrates Santa Cruz city, county

By BUD O'BRIEN

OFFICIALS AT UC-Santa Cruz perhaps believed they'd come up with an idea that would evoke nothing but applause from the surrounding community when they first proposed building a "research and development" center on one of the vast tracts of virgin acreage on the campus.

Or maybe — being aware of the fact that in Santa Cruz everything from the sale of Girl Scout cookies to the fate of the Santa Cruz Cypress is capable of stirring the most purple of passions — they knew what they were in for.

In any event, that proposed project — called variously a research and development (or R&D) center, a "high tech park," an "industrial park" — has become the focal point of the most bitter feuding that has occurred between the university and local government officials since that institution (known sometimes as The City on a Hill) was founded two decades ago.

But it is not a clear-cut "town vs. gown" issue in the classic sense of the university as a community with its own values, life styles, etc., pitted against the more traditional mores of the town. It is more a case of the administration of the university — specifically of the boss, Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer — against the activist "progressive" city government, which,

ironically, derives much of its intellectual and electoral sustenance from — the university.

From that perspective, it can be viewed not as town vs. gown but as just one more battle in the bitter political war being waged between "progressive" and "conservative" (or "moderate") factions over who should plot the future of the city (and county) of Santa Cruz. Some of the most powerful allies in the anti-Sinsheimer camp are from the university, students and faculty, and the biggest boosters of the R&D project (which we will call it from now on for purposes of convenience) are those who on other occasions and in other circumstances deplore the influence of that institution on their city.

(Even now, for example, Santa Cruz conservatives — who have assumed a friendly attitude toward the R&D proposal — are busy challenging in court the votes of more than 450 students in last November's election in an effort to seize control of the City Council from the current progressive majority.)

But what is the R&D proposal all about, and why has it aroused such passions? That, naturally, depends on who's talking.

To Chancellor Sinsheimer and his supporters, such a development would serve two vital purposes: it would provide a source of income at a time of financial austerity, while simultaneously adding breadth to the academic

and educational programs at the university.

For the community as a whole, the R&D center if it proceeds as envisioned could provide up to 2,000 new jobs and a substantial new tax base.

What would it consist of? A good question that cannot yet be answered in detail, although there is no dearth of "expert opinion" being hurled around in efforts to persuade people one way or the other.

In broad outline what Chancellor Sinsheimer proposes is to develop 108 acres just to the north of Crown College into a facility that would be leased to private firms for use in researching and developing new products. There would also be some manufacturing allowed, but only at a carefully controlled level, officials say. Most likely, firms which would be interested in such an arrangement would be involved in the electronics or other "high tech" business, with the possibility that "think tanks" involved in the social sciences and humanities might also be attracted to such a facility.

Whatever industries are ultimately selected, the plan calls for direct "interaction" between the academic programs of the university and the R&D center. In the words of Chancellor Sinsheimer (who was unavailable for an interview in connection with this article, but who is on the record in abundant detail), "a variety of academic

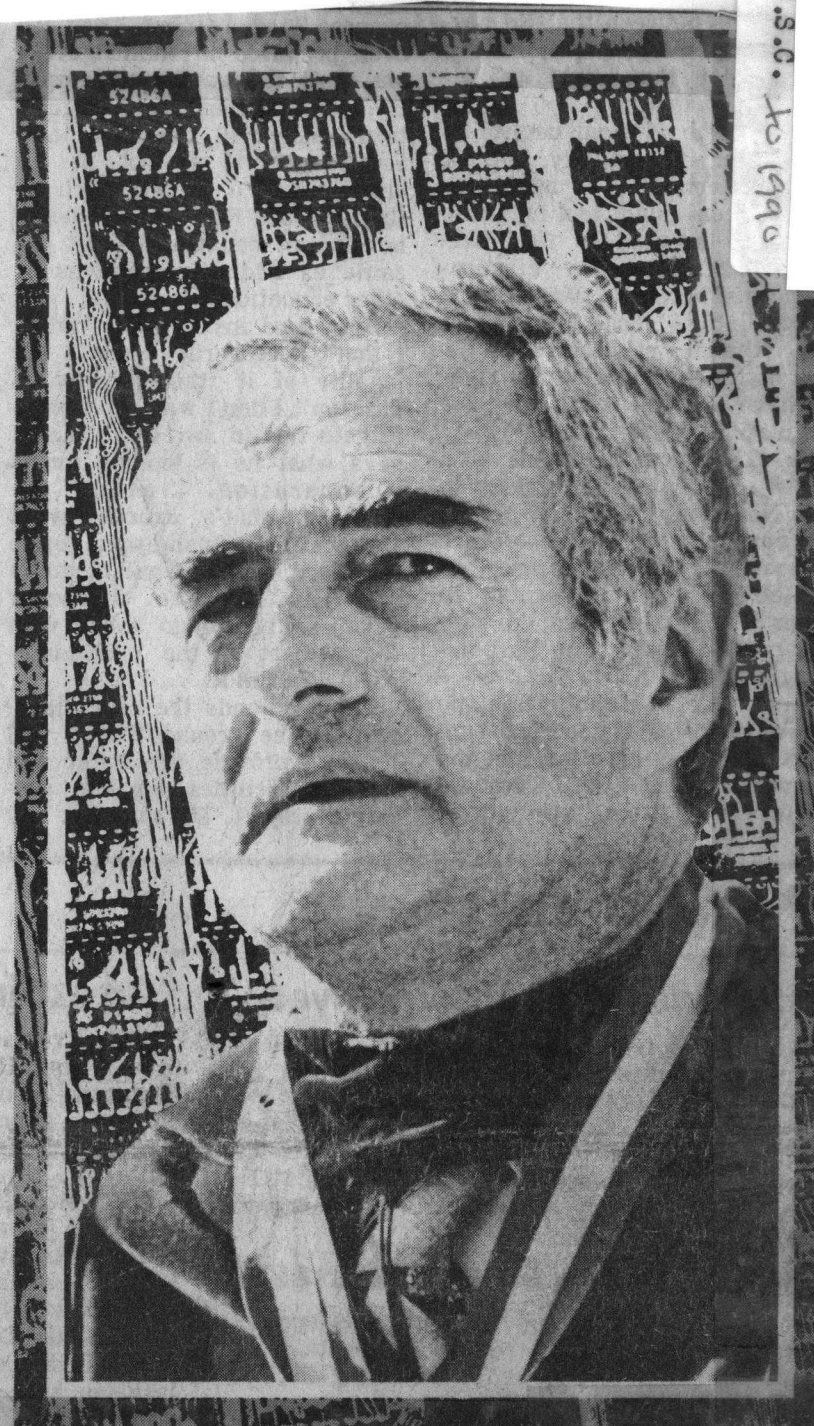
interactions are conceivable, including cooperative education programs for students, research and consulting interactions for faculty, continuing education programs for employees of the firms involved, the use of industrial researchers as part-time faculty, employment for our graduates, and so on..."

Thus, the chancellor paints a word picture of a dynamic new complex on the UCSC campus, one interacting academically with the university. All that in addition to the financial benefits that would flow to the university — and the community — from the R&D center.

Except that almost every assumption that is contained in the chancellor's scenario is challenged at one point or another by the foes of the proposal. They call the project a financial gamble, are dubious of its benefits to the academic program, fear that it will change the character of the university (one report cited concerns that "the center would shift the balance of the campus toward the sciences and away from the humanities and social sciences..."), worry that it will be used for weapons research, etc.

But the most powerful argument, or at least the one that has won the most popular support, against the Sinsheimer plan is that it presents a threat to the resources and finances of adjacent local governments,

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Sinsheimer is pushing the high-tech park.

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January 21, 1984

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particularly to the city of Santa Cruz. This argument is buttressed by the fact that, while the city is bound by contract to provide sewerage and water to the campus, the university is exempted by the state constitution from subjecting its development to local land use regulations.

It is this exemption from local regulations, and Chancellor Sinsheimer's adamant refusal to submit voluntarily to the local planning processes, that has ignited the most heated exchanges between the two parties — perhaps contributing more heat than light to the situation.

That issue of local control of land use — certainly one of genuine concern — also provides a convenient tool for those who are opposed to the R&D proposal under any circumstances. They have used it as a persuader on those who might favor the idea of the R&D center but believe the university ought to have to obey local land use regulations just like anybody else. That this argument is a potent one was demonstrated in the November election when 72 percent of the city's voters approved a ballot measure that called on the university to submit its proposal to the city for processing through its planning channels.

That overwhelming vote no doubt reflected widespread support for the proposition that the university should not be treated differently from any other

"developer" in the city, even if it could not be interpreted as an expression of popular opposition to the R&D proposal itself. Other polls have indicated popular support for the development. It also happened to be a vote without legal bite. Approval of the ballot measure was, in effect, only an expression of opinion because it has no binding effect on the university.

But city officials, led by Mayor John Laird and armed with the mandate of their voters, pledge to fight to the end for a significant voice in the proposed development. They are even prepared to challenge the assumption that the university is exempt from local regulations under all circumstances. Laird says it is not at all certain that a project such as the proposed R&D center should be exempt because it's not the same as adding classrooms or other educational facilities.

But Laird insists that, "while I don't necessarily concede the legality of it (the university's position), I don't want to have to litigate this in any way." Laird says what he is looking for is "cooperation." And, he asserted, that's exactly what Chancellor Sinsheimer once promised. Laird is one of many who say that the chancellor promised not to go ahead with the project if the community wasn't behind it.

Laird defends the city's position on the ground that it will have to provide the water and sewage facilities for the proposed project. He said the city

would have to put up the money — which could range up to \$8 million — to finance new sewer lines, and that the city's water situation is already at a point where any new pressures on it would mean it would have to look for new sources of water, the costs of which are incalculable.

Laird is careful, however, not to take a position on the project itself: "The issue is not the project, but whether it's going through the (planning) process."

Chancellor Sinsheimer has shown no sign of bending on that point. It is not even certain that he could if he wanted to, given the state constitutional provision that frees the university from local land use controls and the probability that only the Regents of the university have the authority to waive that provision.

There are the political realities as well. The chancellor could be forgiven for believing that the chances of the R&D proposal surviving a trip through the planning processes of either the city or county of Santa Cruz — given the political makeup of the governing bodies of those two jurisdictions — would be roughly that of the proverbial snowball in you know where.

County Supervisor Gary Patton, for one, is quite candid in conceding that even if the university acceded to the demand that it go through local planning procedures he would find it next to impossible to

approve anything like the proposed R&D center.

"I don't think it's good for the campus, the people, or the university," Patton said.

It was at Patton's urging that the county Board of Supervisors entered the fray this month by asking that Chancellor Sinsheimer submit the plans for the R&D center to the county for approval — a request he is no more likely to accede to than he has to the city's importunings.

The county has a direct stake in the R&D proposal because the acreage involved is actually in the county (it would be annexed to the city if the R&D proposal were to be approved) and the university is depending on the county to build an "eastern access" road connecting the campus to the Highway 1-Highway 9 intersection. The county agreed to build that road as part of the negotiations that resulted in the university establishing a campus in Santa Cruz.

Beyond that, strong growth-control advocates such as Patton view the R&D proposal as a threat to the environment and character of this county. Patton — who has called the R&D center the largest single industrial development ever proposed for the county — says such a development would be one more giant step toward converting Santa Cruz County into another Silicon Valley, a prospect that Patton warns against at every opportunity.

As have others, Patton, conceding the university's need for more money, urged the chancellor and his superiors — the Regents and UC President David Gardner — to consider alternate ways of using the extra acreage on the campus, such as a conference center on the model of Asilomar, or perhaps allowing the cultivation of vineyards.

So far as spokesmen for the university are concerned, those engaging in such speculations, suggestions, accusations and assertions are simply burying the rather simple facts of the situation under torrents of rhetorical rubbish.

To begin with, said Stephen Reed, UGSC's director of legislative and community relations, the impression being spread that the university is going to plant some monster development on the campus day after tomorrow without regard for its impacts on local resources or in haughty defiance of local desires is sheer nonsense.

In fact, Reed said, the university is bound by the state's environmental quality regulations (CEQA) and is even now having an environmental impact report prepared. This EIR, Reed said, would reveal what impacts on the resources of the city that the proposed R&D center would have. He said that the figures being tossed around by Mayor Laird and others are little better than speculation and are almost certainly on the inflated side.

Preliminary studies show that the R&D center might require no new sewage lines at all, Reed said, and in any case the project would be an incremental one, taking from seven to 10 years to complete, so that the impacts could be absorbed gradually.

Reed noted that the university master plan calls for the university to grow eventually to an institution housing 27,000 students, and that it was in anticipation of a campus operation of that amplitude that both the city and county signed agreements to provide certain services. That plan is now on hold, if not indeed a dead letter for all

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practical purposes, and the university has leveled off at about 7,000 enrollment.

Said Reed: "No matter what you say about the size of the project, it in no way compares to 6,000 or 12,000 more students taking showers or flushing toilets."

Without the dynamism of growth and a dependable source of revenue, the university is faced with stagnation, Reed said, echoing a theme of Chancellor Sinsheimer. Without the resources of other wealthier campuses (UCLA, UC-Berkeley, etc.), Reed said UCSC came up

with the idea of the R&D center as both a source of revenue and a broadening and reinvigoration of the academic program on the campus.

Both Reed and Colette Murray, assistant vice chancellor for university relations, said that the repetitious labeling of the R&D center as a "profit-making" enterprise was a characterization more political than factual. While it is obviously true that whatever private businesses participated in the facility would intend to make money, they said the university would not make a "profit" in the usual sense of that word, but would

simply have a source of revenue not now available for the pursuit of the university's academic mission.

"We're just trying to maintain the excellence we feel we deserve," Ms. Murray said.

Reed pointed out that there are misconceptions about how the university and its several campuses derive revenue. He said that in UCSC's case, only about half the money for operating the campus comes directly from taxes. The other half comes from the Regents (who have funding sources independent of taxes), endowments, gifts, etc. The Regents prod individ-

ual campuses to augment their income, which is what UCSC is trying to do with its R&D proposal.

Reed said the university appreciates the problems of the local communities and it has done everything it can to involve them in the planning for the R&D center without yielding the prerogatives it has under state law. For example, he said public hearings had been held, though they are not required by law. He said the university remains willing to work with city and county officials to the extent allowed by its own legal strictures.

But Reed makes it clear university officials believe some city and county officials are using the local control issue as

a way to block the R&D center for reasons more political than procedural.

Reed noted that the city of Santa Cruz is growing at a rate of 1,000 residents a year right now and that the effort to make a "cause celebre" out of the R&D proposal is being used by some to deflect attention from growth problems that preceded that proposal and will continue if it never comes to fruition.

Nevertheless, Reed kept returning, as had Mayor Laird, to the theme of cooperation. He repeatedly said the university understands that there are traffic, sewage and water problems to be addressed, and that it wants to cooperate with the city and county in addressing them.

But there appears to be little

chance that cooperation will extend to the point of giving the city or county any veto power over the development. Laird, who is a UCSC graduate, says he wants to do nothing that would hurt the university, but he has indicated that he will take the city's case to Sinsheimer's superiors — UC President David Gardner, who is to be in Santa Cruz next month, and to the Regents.

Supervisor Patton has already written a letter to the Regents urging them to force the university to obey local planning regulations, but he conceded that they are not likely to forfeit a prerogative that might stand as a precedent. Patton said he was willing to take the issue to the courts.