

REDEVELOPMENT FUNDING

County, city seek to protect cash slated for Arana Gulch

Greenbelt
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The \$4 million trail through Arana Gulch — as discussed, delayed and divisive as any parks proposal in recent memory — is taking on one last wrinkle before the project goes back to the state Coastal Commission for approval.

Hoping to protect a critical piece of funding, the county and city recently approached Friends of Parks and Recreation of Santa Cruz to act as a steward of \$1.4 million in redevelopment funds, as maneuvering in Sacramento regarding the future of redevelopment agencies continues.

"I think the idea is, we're just holding on to the money," said Charlie Verutti, president of Friends of

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Parks and Recreation, whose group voted unanimously last week to get involved in the project.

Friends of Parks and Recreation wouldn't oversee the project, but its participation could help the project survive any legal challenges. The county has recently been seeking third-party partners for \$75 million in redevelopment projects, hoping private contracts help guard against any legislative efforts to void new redevelopment projects.

The Arana Gulch project would connect Broadway and Brommer Street, providing a link between Santa Cruz and Live Oak sought by bicyclists and others.

"Anything we can do to get bicycle and foot traffic off Soquel Avenue is a good thing, from an injury-prevention point of view," Verutti said.

But the paved path would travel through a swath of

open space behind the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor, outraging some environmentalists. They fear the project's impact on the Santa Cruz tarplant, an endangered flower native to the area, among other things. The project includes a tarplant preservation plan, though some deem it insufficient.

The movement of money is raising eyebrows among critics, with the city using the county's redevelopment money to help pay for the project.

"The whole redevelopment shuffle of money from the county to the city, in my opinion, smacks of sharp practice," said project opponent Jean Brocklebank, using a legal pejorative used to describe deceptive maneuvers.

When the abolishment of redevelopment agencies was first floated as a way to help balance the state budget deficit, the county's redevelopment agency moved to commit the money through contracts with other government entities. But recent versions of legislation make clear that

won't fly.

The county is now seeking private partners on a number of high-profile projects, including a new headquarters for the sheriff, with the county looking at the Live Oak Business Park, largely owned by Barry Swenson Builders, as a potential site.

The Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County also is considering oversight of a handful of projects, and the county is in talks with third parties on a new Live Oak youth center and county mental health unit.

While Friends of Parks and Recreation shares an address with the Santa Cruz parks department, Verutti said it is a separate entity that merely

has a mailbox there. He said the group would make no money off the deal.

Having previously been rejected, the Arana Gulch project is slated for another review at the Coastal Commission. Santa Cruz Assistant Public Works Director Chris Schneider said no date has been set for that review, though he hopes it comes sometime in the summer.

But without the county's redevelopment money, the project might have to go back to the drawing board — again.

"We would probably not be able to implement the Arana Gulch Master Plan until more money is identified," Schneider said.