

Landmark compromise reached

By STEVE STROTH
STAFF WRITER

Feuding Watsonville and Santa Cruz County officials have come up with a compromise they hope will settle the legal dispute over the planned Landmark Industrial Park.

No one would say just what the proposal is, but there should be some indication next week whether or not the dispute will have to be settled in court.

By that time, the City Council, Board of Supervisors and Landmark developers will have decided if the proposal is acceptable.

If it's rejected, a Nov. 22 Superior Court date has been set to try the case.

But negotiating teams for all three sides had hoped to avoid that, and have reached the compromise agreement after

more than two months of weekly meetings.

The final meetings were Monday and Thursday of last week.

Now, negotiators will take the proposal back to their respective groups for review.

The board, which sued the city July 26 because it feared severe housing and traffic problems from the project, could review the proposal at its meeting tomorrow. The City Council will probably examine it Oct. 15, and the 12 investors in the Landmark project will be reviewing the proposal this week.

Mayor Ann Soldo, part of the city's team, said this morning that she hopes the council will approve the proposal but wouldn't predict how other council members will respond.

When asked whether or not she could live with the proposal, she said, "As far as the city goes, yes."

Landmark developer Scott Johnson said today that he is uncertain if city and county officials will approve the agreement.

"There's no way to tell for sure," he said. "You can never tell if the negotiators are within or outside their authority when they are making these compromises."

He also wasn't sure if his investment partners will agree with the proposal. He said he will be contacting them by phone this week.

Johnson said all three parties in the dispute changed their original positions during negotiations, especially the county.

"They've come from way out in left field when this thing

began to a position of moderation," he said.

"No one made adjustments so that we would have a guaranteed settlement so I don't know if anything will come of it," he said. "Clearly there were still differences in the end, but I hope there will be a settlement."

In the compromise, the city did not give up its right to decide what projects it will approve, Johnson said.

County Counsel Dwight Herr refused to confirm the existence of an agreement or the current status of the negotiations.

"I can't comment on any of that," he said. "We may discuss the Landmark issue during closed session with the board tomorrow, but I can't say what aspect of it will be discussed."