

Local news

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Greenbelt Cold water thrown on greenbelt donation plan

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — A lukewarm response from the Water Department on using utility bills to solicit contributions for open-space land forced the Greenbelt Committee to consider other options on Wednesday.

Bill Kocher, director of the city's Water Department, said it appeared that the cost of converting the bills and entering contributions by hand could eat heavily into donation totals.

"Our system is fairly automated, and this would put it basically back to manual mode," said Kocher. "My preference

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would be not to do this."

But Vice Mayor Celia Scott and Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, two members of the Greenbelt Committee, suggested that the best option would be to find a way to gauge community support for the idea.

What the committee members hope to do is find a way for city residents to donate to the greenbelt trust fund, established by the council to raise money for buying and maintaining greenbelt land.

They had hoped that people could

"round up" their utility bills to the next dollar and check a box on the bill indicating they wanted the excess change to go to the trust fund.

There are 11,000 single-family accounts billed by the Water Department every other month. Kocher estimated that an average of 50 cents would be donated by between 1 percent and 5 percent of the households based on previous fund-raising efforts.

Kocher said, however, that he believes participation would be so minimal that the \$330 to \$1,650 he projected could be raised wouldn't offset increased staff costs. In fact, it would take 10 percent of households to participate to break even, said

Kocher.

"It doesn't make sense to go forward with this until we get a better idea what support is out there," said Scott.

One idea was to put an article in the next Surf City News, a newsletter produced by City Hall. In addition, a card could be inserted in the October Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities Review, a newsletter published by the Water Department. That card would allow people to check off whether they would be interested in contributing to the greenbelt trust fund.

To let the Greenbelt Committee know how you feel about voluntarily "rounding up" your utility bill to support the greenbelt land, call Scott or Beiers at City Hall, 429-3550.