

# San Lorenzo flood plan drowning on Capitol Hill

By KAREN CLARK  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Immediate federal funding for the city's San Lorenzo River flood-control project once again appears to be in danger of drying up.

The project, which could save the city \$70-million in potential flood damage and would cut the cost of flood insurance downtown, has become part of the federal budget battle.

Senate Appropriations Committee decided last week not to allocate \$200,000 to get the project started next year, which means lobbyists face an uphill battle when the bill comes to the Senate floor.

A similar battle will be waged on the House floor, where committee members also have decided against funding any new flood-control projects because of budget constraints.

The project involves raising the bridges and improving the levees. The city has begun spending its own money on the bridges, expecting the federal government to come up with its fair share.

If the project doesn't make it into either bill, there's still a chance for funding. The conference committee that will iron out the two versions of the legislation could add in the project, but again it will be an uphill battle.

"Conference committees have been known to produce magic," said Alec Arago, a legislative assistant for U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel. "We just have to do some conjuring between now and then."

The news has deflated city offi-

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## Flood

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cials, who had hoped the project would be funded immediately after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in May backed off from its recommendation that funding be delayed.

"I'm really frustrated," said Joe Hall, assistant director of the city's Redevelopment Agency and the man who has helped shepherd this project along for more than a decade.

"It's like being the construction engineer on the pyramids," said Arago about Hall's frustration, "and the Pharaoh keeps saying, 'Well, just wait another five years,' and he says, 'Oh, no, I've got all these rocks piled up.'"

One bright note, however, is the House Appropriations Committee's decision to recommend reserving \$600,000 to restore the riverbank habitat once the flood-control project is completed.

"It's sort of putting the cart before the horse, but it's something," said Arago.

The Senate, however, also must approve putting that money in reserve.

Arago said the initial funding request this year was for \$17 million to fund the entire project, but that was whittled to \$200,000 once it became clear that new projects would be left on the cutting-room floor.

Carolyn Chaney, the city's lobbyist in Washington, D.C., said Sen. Barbara Boxer is trying to find other places to cut so that there will be room for the Santa Cruz project when the bill comes to the floor.

Downtown property owners pay \$500,000 a year in flood insurance. That cost would be substantially reduced if the San Lorenzo River flood-control project is completed because the levee improvements are designed to withstand a 100-year flood.

Just such a flood struck the city in 1955, when the entire downtown, which is in the flood plain, was under water.

Afterward, the Army Corps of Engineers built a flood-control project along the lower stretch of the river. But as early as 1957 it became clear the new project was inadequate, and studies for a new project began 15 years ago.

The project finally was up for congressional approval in 1994, but legislators ran out of time and the flood-control package was not approved.

Arago said he expects the House to begin considering the appropriations bill on July 29. The Senate may lag behind that date.

Some Republican senators, however, may push for a quick "omnibus bill," that would allow one vote to cover every appropriations bill so they could go home for the year to campaign.