

Broadway/Brommer vote set tonight

Bike path plan up for approval

By **DAN WHITE**

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Cyclists will cross their fingers tonight when the City Council takes up the so-called Broadway/Brommer bike path.

But a group of opponents insists a previous City Council was right to kill the plan to create a cross-town bike trail, and that it should stay dead.

The council will vote whether to certify an environmental impact report for the project, which would bisect 63-acre Arana Gulch, a greenbelt area above Santa Cruz harbor.

A yes vote would be the first step in a long approval process. Nevertheless, it would be an initial vote of confidence on

what has been a hotly debated project.

At a meeting last month, more than 50 speakers addressed the council, with about half calling the path an eco-friendly trail that would provide cyclists with a safe east-west route across the city. Another two dozen speakers called it an environmental travesty that would waste taxpayer money. The commentary went on so long the council postponed action until tonight.

Few high-profile projects slip under the radar in Santa Cruz, but this one has sparked exceptionally passionate debate. Bike activists say they are fighting for safety, and want to give bicyclists routes that keep them away from car traffic. Many consider the path a major missing piece in a city-wide bike network.

But opponents, including residents who live within a few blocks of the gulch, say the project would harm endangered tarplants that grow only in Santa Cruz County. They also decry the projected \$1.5 mil-

lion price, and say police patrols and security would be needed if the project is built.

"You need to make a general plan for this greenbelt," opponent Maya Sapper of Santa Cruz wrote the council. "Is it open space or not? Would you consider a bike path through Pogonip to make it more convenient to go to UCSC?" Sapper also complained the path would be an attractive nuisance for "bums."

But another resident, Cory Ray, in an e-mail called the path a resource that would make it easier to tread more gently on the earth: "I liken it to recycling. If you remove barriers, then people who are considering participating are more likely to do so."

The county Regional Transportation Commission has said federal funds set aside to cover the project's costs cannot be transferred to "alternative" proposals, including a cheaper one that avoids the gulch and connects to Frederick Street.

Public Works Director Mark Dettle and City Manager Dick Wilson say the project would make the area safer by opening it up to more recreational users, and that alternatives, such as an option employing Frederick Street park, would have serious impacts, likely creating use conflicts within a neighborhood playground.

Approving the EIR would be the first of many steps in the approval process. Among other things, the Planning Commission would need to hold a public hearing on amending the general plan. The Parks and Recreation Commission also would need to hold a public hearing.

The council, which meets at 809 Center St., will take up the Broadway-Brommer bike path at its 3 p.m. session.

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