

County backs Arana Gulch trail

Greenbelt

Coastal Commissioner Stone declines to lend support

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SANTA CRUZ — Supporters of a bike path through the city's 68-acre Arana Gulch got a boost Tuesday when the county Board of Supervisors committed to backing the project.

The trail is part of a city plan to provide more public access to the greenbelt, an effort that's not always gone smoothly. In fact, it's touched off debate between unlikely adversaries: bicyclists who want a paved link between the city's east and west sides and environmentalists worried a path will harm the area's threatened tarplant.

The issue came before county

supervisors this week because the city is seeking approval for its Arana Gulch Master Plan and wants county support. A small section of the greenbelt is under the county's purview, and city planners want to approach regulators at the California Coastal Commission with a unified voice.

"Not only do we have the support of the council, now we have the support of the Board of Supervisors," City Councilman and plan proponent Ryan Coonerty said after getting word of the board's vote. "We're happy. It's been a long process."

Dozens filled the supervisors chamber Tuesday to encourage



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

SEE ARANA ON B10 Jim Duffy walks along one of the Arana Gulch paths on Tuesday.

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the board to get behind the city, many of them bicyclists who say a trail through Arana Gulch is the best way to avoid busy streets on either side of the greenbelt.

"Going over the harbor bridge, that's a scary place," Cary Friedman said. Others cited the northerly route on Soquel Avenue as equally unfit for bicyclists.

But not everyone wanted the county to endorse the city plan, including Supervisor Mark Stone, who was recently appointed to the Coastal Commission and will be one of 12 people to decide the plan's ultimate fate.

Stone supported a motion Tuesday that

allows the city to speak for the county before the Coastal Commission on the Arana Gulch issue, but he cast the sole dissenting vote on another motion committing county support for the city plan.

"I would like to have a little bit more time to take a look at the entire issue," he said. "We have plenty of time to have appropriate review."

A hearing by the Coastal Commission, which has final say over development near the ocean, has not been set.

The plan has already been subject to intense scrutiny, including a decade of discussion in the city of Santa Cruz as well as a lawsuit questioning the environmental impact of increased access at the reserve. A San Jose appellate court in August ruled against the suit.

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Opponents of the city plan were among those at Tuesday's board meeting making their case before the Board of Supervisors.

"(Bicyclists) are not helping the environment by taking over natural space in the name of convenience. This is arrogance, ever-loving arrogance," said Santa Cruz resident Kit Birskeovich.

The Arana Gulch Master Plan calls for a handful of trails through the greenbelt and one pedestrian-bicycle bridge, which

would ultimately link Brommer and Broadway. Most of the area would remain undeveloped, under the plan, and restoration efforts would be drawn up for the ecologically sensitive meadows, including tarplant habitat.

"I've been in support of this path for a longtime," said Supervisor Neal Coonerty, who represents the city on the Board of Supervisors. "I think the east-west access for pedestrians and bicyclists is important."