

Polo Grounds development approved

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Intensive development of Aptos' Polo Grounds as a regional county park was approved yesterday by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

Supervisors approved an alternative calling for construction of a 13,000-square-foot community center, Little League and soccer playing fields along with nature and jogging trails and a natural area called the Great Meadow.

The decision, authored by Aptos-Capitola supervisor Robley Levy, was a defeat for Polo Grounds neighbors who lobbied hard for an alternative that eliminated the use-intensive Little League fields, and scaled back traffic and noise in the now-secluded neighborhoods.

The Polo Grounds was purchased several years ago by the

county for \$2.5 million. It was originally used by Aptos pioneer Claus Spreckels and his socialite friends as a polo field and continued as such into the 1920s.

Since then, it has been farmed at various time and has also lain fallow for years at a time while owners pursued plans to build upwards of 700 homes and a senior citizen congregate-care residential complex.

After the county purchased the park, the parks and recreation department contracted with a consultant, Callander Associates, to develop a master plan.

After a series of meetings in 1988 and 1989 with area residents and a technical advisory committee composed of neighbors and representatives from the community at large, the consultants recommended two alternatives - Alternative A, which called for construction of a community

center and soccer fields, and Alternative B, which added Little League and Pony League fields to the plan.

The county Parks and Recreation Commission, after a sometimes stormy hearing last month, sided with Little League supporters and approved Alternative B.

Polo Drive residents turned out in force yesterday morning to lobby for minimal development.

Most speakers supported Alternative A, arguing that the Little League should find space elsewhere.

A handful, including Aptos resident Jeff Young, argued that the county should either allow the 62-acre site to return to a totally natural state or allow an organic farmer to continue farming a portion of the property.

Sierra Club spokesman Dave

Bockman echoed Young, saying that the club opposes the conversion of prime agricultural land.

Levy, however, stood by her recommendations.

"I would say that it is important that the county acknowledge that the Polo Ground was purchased for park use," she said. "When the county purchased this land the zoning would have accommodated 500 to 800 residences. It could have had 5,000 to 7,000 vehicle trips a day.

"A sports complex is not what is proposed. I believe that the parks commission has acknowledged a compromise that satisfies either party. It seems to represent a reasonable balance between the immediate neighbors and the people of the Aptos area who will use and support this park."