

# A little less open?



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Arana Gulch from the air, above Soquel Avenue looking toward the Harbor.

## SC looks at development on Eastside-area greenbelt

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Along with rare tarplant, protected views and heritage trees, add another constraint to developing Arana Gulch: public opinion that prefers the greenbelt be left in its natural state.

Despite that, however, the Santa Cruz City Council voted 5-2, with Councilwomen Celia Scott and Katherine Beiers opposed, to pursue some possible development of the 63-acre property.

Among the possibilities that will be explored are:

- Selling a 20,000-square-foot corner of the lot to expand the Furniture Mart parking lot;
- Selling up to five lots for houses along the greenbelt's alleyway;
- Developing a sports field, picnic tables and small playground and building an elementary school. While not ruled out, both of those items were put on hold until a demographic study by the Santa Cruz School District is completed which shows whether the school is needed.

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— **Scott Kennedy,**  
councilman

The council sifted through the possible development scenarios in hopes of recouping a portion of the \$3.5 million purchase price for the Eastside property. Originally, the council hoped to get up to \$2 million to pay back money borrowed from other city accounts.

Hopes for millions, however, were whittled down as studies revealed more and more development constraints.

The recommendation from the Planning Commission to the council was for

no homes and no commercial development. The commission recommended using parks fees to repay \$250,000 and another \$200,000 which county officials have indicated they would pay for development of a sports field on Arana Gulch.

As an alternative, the Planning Commission suggested selling the piece for the parking lot.

Even that was too much development for most of the people who jammed the Council Chamber to persuade the council to leave Arana Gulch as it is.

"It's a really beautiful piece of land, and I really appreciate the city buying it," said Maya Sapper. "I would like to see it preserved the way it is — naturally."

Teachers, artists and neighbors argued that the property offers a rare swath of peace in their lives, along with a place where hawks soar and where great horned owls live. That, they said, was more important than a school, sports field or parking lot.

Councilman Scott Kennedy pointed to another need: money.

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## Arana Gulch

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"The council, just as any business or any family, has to take finances into account. We can't act like money doesn't matter," Kennedy said.

The city bought the greenbelt to save it from extensive development — one proposal called for 300 homes, said council members. The irony is that some development is needed to pay for saving it, said Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews.

"The problem we've run into now is an ideal that must be made into a reality and funded in some way," she said.

Councilwoman Celia Scott disagreed, said the paradox of the city as a would-be developer was "unacceptable."

"We purchased the land as greenbelt land. I think we should keep it as greenbelt land," Scott said.

Advocates of sports fields also pointed to a great need. Kids are practicing ball at Harvey West fields

at 11:30 p.m. on school nights because that's the only time they can get access to a sports field, said Mayor Mike Rotkin.

"That's not right," Rotkin said. Arana Gulch offers them a chance to have a badly needed field, he said.

Santa Cruz City Schools officials said Arana Gulch is also a last resort place for them to build a school on the Eastside, if a study now under way shows the school is needed.

Gault, Branciforte and DeLaveaga schools are all at or over capacity and are all using portable classrooms, said Matt Farrell, school district trustee.

The council members agreed to put off decisions regarding the western property boundary, where both the sports field and school would be located, until school study is completed in April.

At the same time, council members ruled out development of housing lots on the western boundary.