



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Arana Gulch, a 68-acre designated greenbelt on the Eastside, is a popular destination for dog walkers, strollers and cyclists wanting to get across town without battling vehicular traffic for a few blocks.

Arana Gulch trail project still on the move

Greenbelt

New developments in Santa Cruz plan to build trails, maintain tar plant

By RAMONA TURNER

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SANTA CRUZ — An appeals court in San Jose is set to hear arguments surrounding the merits of the city's Arana Gulch Master Plan on June 25.

This, after the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission's Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee voted Tuesday to send a letter supporting the project to the Californian Coastal Commission, which has the final say over the plan should it again pass court scrutiny.

For about 20 years, the city has been seeking to build a trail system through Arana Gulch, 68 acres of open space bordering Santa Cruz and Live Oak. It's goal was to improve public access — by foot, bicy-

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cle and wheelchair — to the greenbelt, making it the only one in town to include disabled access. That's what swayed the committee's decision.

But the vote dismayed opponents of the plan.

"It's really unfortunate that the committee voted on something without having all the information," said Jean Brocklebank, a member of Friends of Arana Gulch, one of two groups opposing the city's plan.

Neither were at the meeting. The committee based its decision on a presentation by project supporters Charles Dixon and Paul Schoellhamer.

"(The committee was) not

fully informed," Brocklebank said. "I'd hope that we could go before the committee at its next meeting to ask that they hold off on the letter until they hear all the information."

The committee's next meeting is in August.

The city acquired the bulk of the 68-acre property in the early 1990s. In 2006, the city council approved the trail plan, which also calls for the management of the endangered tar plant. The California Native Plant Society and Friends of Arana Gulch filed a lawsuit arguing the plan actually would endanger the tar plant and that alternatives

weren't adequately considered, one of which, by Friends of Arana Gulch, included access for the disabled, Brocklebank said.

In November 2007, the city won the lawsuit, which was appealed in January 2008. The act caused the city to temporarily freeze its application to the Coastal Commission.

"Since the city won the original lawsuit, we can proceed," said Chris Schneider of the city's public works department.

The city has \$1.3 million in transportation grants set aside for the trail component of the plan, Schneider said. Another \$2 million in transportation grant funding will be sought to complete the project, which also includes adding bridge access at Frederick Street.

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