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Some La Selva Beach residents consider these cabooses an eyesore, but others like them just fine.

Battle of cabooses in La Selva

By LANE WALLACE
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Two cabooses without a train have stirred up a controversy in La Selva Beach.

John and Julia King say the two cabooses they placed on their land at the end of Camino Al Mar near the beach in La Selva are pieces of history they intend to restore.

Opponents say the cabooses, installed on the property last fall, are an attractive nuisance. The La Selva Beach Improvement Association is opposing the cabooses, which are on land next to the association's beach property.

The issue will get an airing tomorrow when the county Planning Commission considers the Kings' appeal of the zoning administrator's denial of their

application to keep the cabooses there.

Planning commissioners are already wading through a thick packet of papers on the issue, including a magazine article entitled "Farewell to the Caboose," provided by the Kings. There are petitions signed by 90 people supporting the cabooses and nearly twice that many in opposition. The Kings are asking approval for the two cabooses already there, plus one more.

Controversy began soon after the Kings put in the first caboose in October 1990. The Planning Department, acting on complaints from neighbors, posted a notice of violation on Nov. 30 that said a coastal permit was needed for the caboose.

After a second caboose was

placed on the property, the county went to court and received a temporary injunction prohibiting the Kings from adding more track or more cabooses.

When the Kings applied for a coastal permit in January, the county staff recommended approval. But when a hearing was held in March, the zoning administrator rejected the staff suggestion, saying the cabooses could not qualify as a temporary use because there was no timetable to remove them.

Deputy Zoning Administrator Bob Leggett, who made the denial, said the cabooses are inconsistent with the neighborhood. "Residences, not railroads, are the predominant surrounding land use," he said.

The cabooses could not be

considered accessory uses, Leggett said, because there is no other use of the land. The Kings live in La Selva Beach, but not where the cabooses are.

In a letter to the Planning Department, Julia King said the cabooses need "a considerable amount of work," which she intends to do.

"Cabooses are part of our American heritage and are beautiful pieces of art history," she said. "I do not intend to use them for a hot dog stand or snow cone booth as has been suggested."

The caboose issue is the first matter scheduled for the Planning Commission, which meets tomorrow at 9 a.m. at the County Governmental Center in Santa Cruz.