

Developers eye Arana Gulch as city weighs its prospects

Greenbelt
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SANTA CRUZ — It seems everyone wants a piece of Arana Gulch.

The city bought the gulch in 1994 as greenbelt property to wrap the city's eastern boundary. Now city officials want to recoup some of the \$3.4 million purchase price by developing some of the 63 acres that separate the city from the unincorporated Live Oak area.

Plenty of possibilities are on the table and will be considered tonight by the Santa Cruz Planning Commission.

Among them: a parking lot, a school, playing fields and up to 47 homes. Then again, there's the possibility of doing nothing except protecting the rare tarplants and wetlands.

"Every pair of eyes that looks at it envisions another kingdom," said Patricia Matejeck of Friends of Arana Gulch. Matejeck is among those who would like to leave the property as is, except to restore habitat, and use it as an outdoor environmental classroom. "It's one little piece of land, the last significant open piece that's left."

A Planning Department revenue study has concluded that the city could reap from \$150,000 to \$1.8 million by developing portions of the property. At the same time, there are a number of constraints: endangered Santa Cruz tarplants, protected scenic views, wetlands and flood plains.

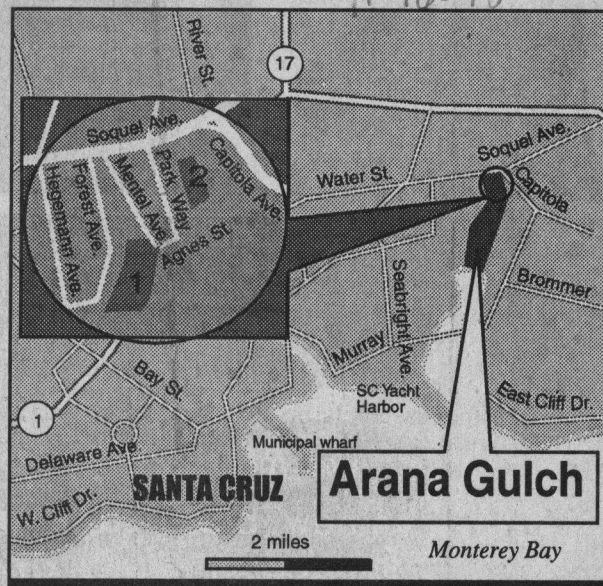
The two main areas under consideration for development are along the alleyway off Agnes Street or land along the west property boundary, largely because they abut existing neighborhoods.

The alleyway, a narrow, 1.5 acre shelf of land bounded by steep slopes, could generate up to \$150,000 to \$300,00 if the city were to sell up to 20,000 square feet for a parking lot. Furniture Mart owner Clark Herbert is interested in buying up to that amount to expand his parking lot for use by medical offices, said Santa Cruz Planner Heather McMillan. If he does, there would still be enough land along the alleyway for eight homes.

The lots could be sold for \$175,000. If the parking lot isn't expanded, there is enough room for 20 clustered units that could yield about \$440,000, she said.

Another four acres along the western property boundary could accommodate another 10 to 27 units. The lots could be sold for about \$1.08 million.

The same four acres, however, could be used for a



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school or playing fields. Santa Cruz City Schools has tentatively identified the site for a new school, and is conducting a demographic study. That study is expected to be done in February or March.

The four acres that are developable, however, may not be large enough for a school, which generally requires about 10 acres, said McMillan.

A soccer field is also possible for the same area. The Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency has offered \$200,000 for the field, with some conditions, said McMillan.

The city Greenbelt Master Plan outlines recreational uses for the property that includes a soccer field, a playground, a restroom, parking and trails for bicyclists and pedestrians.

If the school is built, however, there will not be enough room for the homes.

Meanwhile, a city study is underway on three possible bike paths that could cross portions of the property. That study is scheduled to be completed in December.

The Planning Commission recommendations will go to the Santa Cruz City Council probably in January, said McMillan.

The Planning Commission meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers, 809 Center St.