

Housing suggested for Neary Lagoon

Last chance for city development

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SANTA CRUZ — The territory around Neary Lagoon — one of the city's last chunks of open land — will be developed into townhouses and condominium apartments if city officials follow recommendations from a City Council-appointed task force.

Neary Lagoon, located on a eucalyptus-lined parcel between California and Bay streets, is one of the few chances in the city for development of a substantial housing project.

There is disagreement over what exactly is the right name of the lagoon. City records refer to it both as Neary Lagoon and Neary's Lagoon. A task force appointed to make recommendations on land development surrounding the lagoon calls itself the "Neary Task Force," but the report itself is called "report of the Neary's Task Force."

Sixteen of the vacant acres there are owned by the city.

The seven-member task force recommended the construction of housing on the city-owned land, a five-acre expansion of the lagoon's wildlife refuge and the possible relocation of the Clear View trailer court on the city land should the trailer park be displaced during a proposed expansion of the Dream Inn hotel.

The council will hold a public hearing in April on the recommendations.

Half the apartments and one-quarter of the townhouses would be reserved for low- and moderate-income residents qualifying for the city's affordable housing program.

However, the report notes federal funding that could be used to finance the housing and related projects is threatened by budget cuts proposed by President Ronald Reagan for the 1985 fiscal year.

Task force members recommended a housing project that could generate revenue for the city above other options for land use.

The other options are office and commercial use, a performing and cultural arts center including relocation of the City Museum, and recreation fields and other parks uses.

Also considered, but rejected as a top priority, was an option to do nothing.

Task force members believe four acres of private residentially zoned, vacant property at the site of the old Union Ice plant next to Neary Lagoon could be developed cooperatively with the city property to avoid a piecemeal approach.

Currently there are "no clear ideas" of development of the ice plant property on Jenne Street, according to the report, but task force members suggest 40-60 units could be developed there in a joint venture between the city and the property owner.

A General Plan amendment under consideration by the Planning Commission would require a master site plan before three acres of commercially zoned ice plant property could be re-used.

Following city regulations, the task force reported "affordable" monthly rents for condominium apartments would be \$562 for three-bedroom units, \$431 for two-bedroom units and \$309 for one-bedroom units.

By contrast, market price rents are reported at \$656 for three-bedrooms, \$626 for two bedrooms and \$450 for one bedroom.

"Affordable" townhouse sales prices, based on a survey of prices in Santa Cruz, would be \$75,000 for three-bedroom units and \$68,000 for two-bedroom units. These prices compare to market prices of \$127,000 for three-bedroom and \$117,000 for two bedrooms.

Council policy sets a three-story height limit on the city land.

Eighty-six townhouses and 240 condominium apartments have already been developed on the outskirts of the lagoon.

The lagoon itself is the heart of a 42-acre wildlife refuge for geese, ducks and other species.

Visitors to the sanctuary share the lagoon's swaying, wooden bridge with the ducks who also find it convenient to use as a walkway.

The wildlife, plus public tennis courts, a playground and picnic tables make the lagoon a delight for lovers of the outdoors.

The lagoon dips into a pocket of land, covered by pampas grass, and punctuated

by views of the city in every direction.

There are ducks there with markings so perfect, they look like decoys. The usual mallards and mud hens share the pond with more exotic-looking ducks with powder-blue bills.

Drainage and removal of tule weeds has been a problem. The task force calls for an annual dredging program to keep tules in check, plus drainage, street and other improvements.

The report suggests the 65-space trailer court be relocated on five acres of the city-owned land from its existing site on property owned by the Dream Inn between Bay Street and West Cliff Drive.

The trailer court, located on a bluff above the lagoon, is one of those old-fashioned mobile home parks, with single-wide trailers.

About one-third of the trailers are second homes, says the report.

The task force recommends the mobile homes be eventually phased out from Neary Lagoon if it were relocated.

If part of the property were used for the trailer park, there would be room for 110 units of housing. If all the property were used for houses, 175 units could be developed, the report says.

The Urban Development Action program could be used to finance housing projects tied to a commercial development, such as the Dream Inn expansion or renovation of the ice plant, but these federal grants have been proposed to be cut.

Also on the budget cutting block for 1985 are Housing and Community Development funds for the affordable housing program and senior housing assistance money.

The report notes the city treasury would be fattened by property tax increases due to housing development and the hotel expansion.

Task force members say two of five-acres of the proposed buffer zone between the wildlife refuge and houses could be used for possible expansion of the city's sewer treatment plant located near the lagoon.

Federal flood regulations on new construction would best be met by filling 10 acres to an elevation of 10-feet to match the level of the nearby Shelter Lagoon townhouses and by an increase in elevations of the bottom floors of the apartments. Building on stilts is not recommended.