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Little John Bridge spans Soquel Creek in the forest of Santa Cruz Mountains

# County gets the go-ahead *Bridges* to remove mountain bridge

A Superior Court judge gave the final go-ahead yesterday for the county to start work on replacing the Little John Bridge over Soquel Creek at the intersection of Old San Jose Road and Olive Springs Road.

Superior Court judge Charles S. Franich ruled that the county could allow the Granite Construction Co. to start work on the \$242,000 project as long as workmen followed the specifications laid down by the state Fish and Game Department in a letter to Judge Franich.

Work on the project has been stopped since last November when the Soquel Valley Homeowners Association, William S. Denton and Thomas J. Stern filed suit against the county — charging it had not considered the wishes of the area residents nor considered the environmental impact the project

would have on the Soquel Valley.

In arguments Tuesday, attorney Joseph Molino argued that the county public works department had not complied with the state environmental laws nor had they given an opportunity for public comment about the project.

Assistant Public Works Director John Fantham said he felt that hearings held by the board of supervisors during budget sessions could be considered as public hearings on the project. He said the county received very few comments from the public during those hearings.

Fantham said the county attempts to hold public hearings on controversial projects—such as the two held in the past two months on the widening of 41st Avenue.

Molino contended that the

county could have approached the problem of replacing a bridge in a narrow mountain road in a different fashion, but did not spell out what he meant.

The bridge has been scheduled for replacement for many years but has been the victim of last minute budget cuts and reallocations by the board of supervisors.

Last year, the project was funded and Granite Construction was the low bidder with an estimate of \$242,000 for the project.

Fantham said the bridge was built at about the time of World War I. He described it as being too narrow to handle modern traffic and is structurally unsafe. The concrete arch supports are slowly crumbling, he said. A 10-mph speed limit for heavy trucks has been imposed on the bridge as a safety measure.

In making his ruling this week, Judge Franich told the county:

“It would have been better to give the public an opportunity for input.

“There is a quirk in the law that does not allow for public input in this type of project, but this shouldn't be the case.”

Answering the question of possible pollution to the creek water, Judge Franich said he is satisfied that this has been taken care of by the fish and game department recommendations.

“The bridge is in bad condition. There could be a real tragedy on our hands unless something is done,” he said.

“I feel the problem has been resolved and there is no useful purpose served by delaying the project. My biggest concern is that the county will give the people a chance to express themselves.”