

Greenbelt proponents blast city plan

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Greenbelt proponents blasted the city's plan to allow Bombay Corp. to partially develop protected land on the western edge of the city Saturday, saying the city gets nothing out of the deal.

"It's bad business for the city, and I can't believe that anyone who looks at it carefully would enter into such a crazy deal," said Mayor Katherine Beiers. "As far as I can tell, the city gets nothing out of it. It's all one-sided."

The city announced Wednesday it had reached a settlement with the Bombay Corp. that would allow the development of 10 luxury homes on up to 20 acres of Greenbelt land, in exchange for the property owners dropping a lawsuit against the city.

The property owners also will receive wide-ranging concessions from the city such as waiving most development fees, including those for parks and low-in-

come housing. The waived fees could be as much as \$300,000, according to city officials.

The agreement has to be approved by the council, which has scheduled a public hearing and vote on the issue Thursday.

Longtime progressives and greenbelt supporters said they are shocked by the proposed deal.

"This reverses 15 years of the public process in six days," said Jeff Ringold, a member of the Greenbelt Coalition and former city planning commissioner. "The developer gets everything he wants, the way he wants it."

Protection of the Greenbelt lands has been a defining political issue among progressives, and the city has long fought any attempts to develop greenbelt lands.

The settlement was reached to avoid a costly legal battle with Ed Kashin, owner of Bombay Corp., even though City Council members and attorneys said the

city would win in court. Defending the city's ban on developing the land, however, could cost more than \$500,000 — money the city doesn't have.

The agreement was touted as protecting the great bulk of the 246-acre parcel, while allowing only a small amount of development off the end of Meder Street. City officials in favor of the agreement said it saves legal expenses and protects heart of the property, while giving the city time to buy it.

Opponents say it protects nothing but the developer's desire to make money.

"The greenbelt isn't going to have any better protection after this is signed," said Brant Smith, a member of the Greenbelt Coalition. "It is false to claim this protects the greenbelt."

The 11th-hour agreement came as the city faced a Dec. 31 deadline to come up with money to buy the lands. On Jan. 1, voter-approved restrictions on the land expire. The city has already bought two of the

five greenbelt properties — the Pogonip and Arena Gulch.

Greenbelt proponents are concerned the deal is being pushed through too quickly for proper public response.

"There is a serious problem with the public process here," said Councilwoman Celia Scott. "The only thing this guarantees is development."

Details of the agreement are still being worked out, and a series of public meetings and press conferences were being hastily put together.

City Councilmen Scott Kennedy and Mike Rotkin will answer questions on the agreement at 7 p.m. tonight at the Loudon Nelson Center.

The Greenbelt Coalition will have a press conference and meeting at 6:30 p.m. at the Loudon Nelson Center.

The public hearing will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Loudon Nelson Center, 301 Center St., Santa Cruz.