

# Arana Gulch homes on agenda

Green belt

■ **Santa Cruz:** The city council will take up the greenbelt issue tonight.

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK  
Mercury News Staff Writer

The Santa Cruz City Council tonight will consider whether to develop part of the 63-acre Arana Gulch greenbelt land to help the city recover part of its \$3.5 million purchase cost.

Most people would prefer to

leave the land, located between the harbor and Capitola Road, as it is — oak groves, creeks and ocean views — a pleasant contrast to surrounding development.

"I really feel it could be the greatest gift to city and county residents," said Patricia Ma-

tejcek, spokeswoman for Friends of Arana Gulch, a grassroots group that leads hikes through the property.

But city officials still hope to defray at least part of the cost of buying the land through some limited development along its less-attractive north and west edges.

"We're not going to recover all of the money we spent on it," Mayor Mike Rotkin said. "But there are people who would like

us to not do anything with it, which I think is pretty extreme."

The city bought Arana Gulch in July 1994 from the Santa Cruz Auto Plaza, a partnership that wanted to build more than 100 houses there. The deal ended a 15-year battle over the most prominent piece of undeveloped private land left in the city.

To buy the land, city officials emptied the \$2.12 million capital improvement fund, money normally used for such things as

roads and bridges. The rest of the purchase money came from the city's worker's compensation, parks facility and general funds.

At the time, city officials planned to recover about \$2 million by allowing 10 to 20 houses to be built on the north and west edges of the property.

But a city land-use study last year said that because of physical and environmental constraints on

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Whether the Arana Gulch greenbelt will be left undeveloped is before the Santa Cruz City Council.

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the property, there isn't much room for homes as well as the soccer field, picnic area and other amenities residents have been clamoring for. It also said the city would gain less than was expected from development.

With that in mind, both the planning commission and the city council's greenbelt committee recommended recreational uses only for the land. The proposed soccer field, trails, playground, restroom and parking area would be built along the west property line.

Such a plan, however, would

bring in only about \$450,000. The county would contribute \$200,000 if the sports field were built, and the city could generate \$250,000 in five years through its park fee.

As an alternative, the commission suggested allowing up to five homes to be built along with the recreational uses, bringing in as much as \$926,000. The council's committee also recommended an alternative allowing a neighboring business to expand parking along the north edge of the land, raising total revenue to \$750,000.

City staffers, meanwhile, have recommended that the council hold off on a decision until the

school district decides whether it will need some of the land for a new school.

Matejcek said the city can live without the money from development, since downtown has recovered from the 1989 earthquake and the city has sold some land near Scotts Valley.

But Rotkin, who favors the alternative that would allow up to five homes, said the city still needs money for other environmental and social programs.

### IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Santa Cruz City Council will discuss the Arana Gulch property during today's 7 p.m. meeting at City Hall, 809 Center St.