

Council says informal talks OK

... if they're not on research park

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council majority wants to follow through on a plan to meet informally with UC Santa Cruz officials over issues of mutual concern, as long as the issues exclude Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer's controversial proposal for an on-campus research and development center.

The council agreed Tuesday to send another in a series of letters to Sinsheimer on the proposed research park topic.

The gist of the latest letter will tell Sinsheimer the council wants to keep open the doors of communication between City Hall and The City on a Hill, and doesn't want disagreement over the proposed research park to block discussions of other issues of mutual concern.

Councilman Arnold Levine again called for informal meetings between a council subcommittee, Sinsheimer and his colleagues, and possibly county supervisors' representatives — "to do a little backyard gossiping."

Levine sees the subcommittee meetings as a way for the city, county and university to talk in a neighborly fashion over a variety of issues, not necessarily the research park.

The council previously supported a \$10,000 joint research project — called the Santa Cruz Area Study Project — between the university and city, and possibly involving county officials, to study community issues. The issues include the city's transient population.

But the council majority insisted any subcommittee meetings be public and follow the rules of the Brown Act, the law designed to keep public decisions from being made behind closed doors.

The chancellor has suggested meeting with city representatives on an informal basis over

the research park proposal, but the council majority maintains the topic is such an explosive one in the community that meetings must be held in public.

Mayor John Laird suggested delaying any meetings until the research park issue is resolved. He said any issue of mutual concern to the city and university — such as new sewer lines, a new eastern access to campus or enrollment figures — would eventually involve a discussion of the research park project.

But Levine said it would be unwise for the council to wait several months to hold meetings with the university lest someone mention the "fearful" words: research and development center.

Council members Spiro Mellis and Katy Sears-Williams sided with Levine, with Mellis saying the council majority's attitude was "holier than thou."

Mellis said private meetings involving the city and different agencies are held "all the time" but not in violation of the Brown Act.

"Why is it that just because (this) involves the university that, all of a sudden everything has to be done in public. That's ridiculous."

He said previous private meetings, on such topics as payment of sewer fees, have resulted in "benefits to the city."

Levine said the city and university representatives "have to have the ability to talk about things" which can be difficult under the "glare" of the press and public.

He said "anything important" would come back to the council for a decision anyway.

At the knot of the controversy is Measure A — a ballot measure passed by voters in Novem-

ber that directs the council to maintain planning authority over the research center project.

Measure A has not been tested in court.

The university argues its authority stems from the state constitution and therefore can't be usurped by local planning laws.

Councilman Michael Rotkin, a UCSC lecturer, said the council should stick with Measure A and not re-open the research park issue at this point in light of "clear evidence" regarding the "lack of feasibility" for the project.

"Even people in the development community are wondering if the research and development (project) makes sense," said Rotkin.

But Rotkin noted any council member has the right to talk with university representatives, or anyone else for that matter, on an informal basis.

"I don't see any problem with truly informal meetings. I draw the line short of appointed committee (meetings)."

Rotkin said the research park proposal has "literally" invaded all topics of discussion on campus to the point a teacher can't make a request for supplies without being reminded of budget woes that could be averted by income from a research center.

But Levine said he "is not afraid to take the chance" to hold the meetings.

"Maybe in the discussions, we could convince the university that the research and development park is a foolish (proposition). Who knows, stranger things than that have happened."

"What?" Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt demanded to know.