

Supervisors strike accord on Live Oak aquatics center

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SANTA CRUZ — Ah, politics.

The art of compromise was never more evident than Tuesday afternoon when the Board of Supervisors met to discuss a proposed swimming-pool and recreational-vehicle park in Live Oak.

It's hard to believe that a swimming-pool/RV park could draw such

controversy as this project has over the years. It has strong community support and would ostensibly help the Santa Cruz Aquatics Team train for competition against powerhouses like the Santa Clara Swim Club over the hill.

But controversy it has, and the discussion Tuesday on whether to give SCAT its long-awaited use permit for the first phase of the 17th Avenue development — the RV park — went back and forth like a ping-pong ball.

Supervisor Gary Patton led the charge against it, with Supervisor Dan Forbus scrambling to carry the project's cause forward.

Ultimately the board granted the

permit — just in time to meet a deadline of today for a \$250,000 grant from the state Coastal Conservancy. According to SCAT planning consultant Steve Russell, the agency has agreed to let the board review the final plans in the next few weeks.

Patton has been a longtime critic of the project. And the proposal's leading proponent is Dick Little, who once ran for supervisor against Patton. Apparently, the rift hasn't healed.

Little, whose own children are stars on the SCAT swim team, has been a prime mover in bringing the

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county its first Olympic-sized swimming pool.

The project has been before the Planning Commission and reviewed by the Planning Department for several months, so it came as somewhat of a surprise that new objections were raised at the 11th hour Tuesday.

But Patton, who in the past has proposed low-income housing for the area, raised them nonetheless.

Patton wanted to delay board approval for several weeks, which would have killed the project.

Pointing to a Planning Department staff report of just-discovered problems, Patton said some of the 127 RV spaces were too close to the riparian setback border (the area protecting a stream). He also complained that SCAT had not included a plan to install a left-turn lane at the entrance on 17th Avenue.

Patton raised a number of other issues as reasons to delay action, and insisted the turn lane be included in the project before the board grant any approval.

Russell countered that the turn lane would kill the project, as it is

estimated to cost \$60,000-\$70,000. Russell assured the board SCAT would not do any grading near the riparian setback, and would be willing even to drop a few of the RV sites if necessary.

That seemed to satisfy the Planning Department staff but not Patton.

Saying he really didn't feel the project "met the normal standards," Patton moved to delay board action three weeks — three weeks beyond the grant deadline.

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara quickly seconded the motion.

But Forbus and Board Chairwoman Robley Levy hung in for a compromise that would give SCAT its much-needed permit, while still addressing Patton's concerns.

They suggested giving SCAT the permit, with the condition that the planning staff review plans with Russell and work out the riparian problem. Also, staff will report back to the board on a time frame for putting in the left-turn lane.

With a consensus developing for the compromise, Patton and Cucchiara joined their colleagues in approving the project.