

# Laguna committee slams hope for a skateboard park

by Corey Young  
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SEBASTOPOL — Supporters of a skate park near the Teen Center will take their case to the City Council despite a negative recommendation from the citizens board overseeing the Laguna wetlands preserve.

The city's Laguna Implementation Committee voted 3-0 Monday to recommend against "future development of recreation uses in the Laguna," citing the absence of such uses from the preserve's master plan.

"We are here to implement the Laguna master plan that was developed by the community over a long

period of time," said committee member Kim Cordell. All three of the proposed locations for a skate park would require the removal of plants restored under that plan, she said.

Possible sites near the Laguna include a Morris Street storage yard used by the city and The Middle Way, a vacant lot between the teen center and the baseball fields and an area behind the teen center.

Cordell said she's asking that wherever a skate park is built, it doesn't replace an existing use, including replanted areas in the preserve built with donations and state money. She also warned that the master plan

prohibits excavation in the preserve because much of the area is landfill and may be polluted.

"We know for sure there's asbestos there," said Cordell. "Just lying there, it's not a problem, but once it's disturbed and airborne, it becomes a hazardous material."

Excavating is also prohibited because "We don't really know what else is there," said Cordell. "It's not in the interest of the city to find out."

City Councilmember Bob Anderson, who attended the meeting, said soil testing on the site would cost about \$4,000. Anderson said he had never seen any test

results showing asbestos in the ground near the preserve.

Skate park advocates have argued that a skate park is a relatively low-impact structure.

"A skate park is just a cement bowl; it's clean," Susan Bendinelli, a member of the West County Skate Park Association, told the committee.

Under the master plan guidelines, no future impervious surfaces — such as a cement skate park bowl — are allowed near the Laguna, said Cordell. Existing recreation uses, such as the baseball fields, are not covered in that plan, she said.

"I'd like to stress that the ball fields were there before the master plan started," said Cordell.

Committee Member Helen Shane said a skate park at the Laguna would also require new bathrooms and more parking.

"My job as a Laguna Implementation Committee member is to uphold the Laguna master plan, and not to further pollute it with built things," she said. "I think it is naive to think that it is just a bowl. It's a bowl that requires parking, a bowl that requires bathrooms and a bowl that requires lots of activity there."

"It's not conducive to what

the Laguna master plan provides for the people of this town," said Shane.

"The Laguna area has been used as a dumping ground," said committee member Richard Nichols. "Enough is enough for the Laguna. I don't want any more messing around with our wetlands. I think putting more stuff down there is a mistake."

Cordell, Shane and Nichols voted for a recommendation to the council stating that "no further area of the Laguna may be considered for active recreation. No future development in the Laguna will displace

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existing uses in the master plan."

Committee member Larry Robinson said he has not made up his mind on the issue and will vote later with

the City Council. Committee member Jeff Edelheit abstained because of his work with The Middle Way, which uses the storage yard near the Teen Center for their landscaping supplies.

Committee members also spoke out about a county parks advisory commission's

refusal to recommend building a skate park at Ragle Ranch Park. Skate park supporters are considering appealing to the county Board of Supervisors.

"The county has to stand up and do its part, in terms of providing recreational needs for the citizens of

West County, not just Sebastopol," said Shane. "I believe that the facility should be at Ragle."

The Laguna committee also passed a motion calling on Sebastopol residents and the city to urge the county to take responsibility in providing a skate park location.