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City okays parts of Laguna report

To no net fill or not to no net fill — that is *still* the question.

But City Council did approve eight of the Laguna Report's general recommendations at this week's meeting.

Council invited William Stillman of the Sonoma County Water Agency to offer his opinion on "no net fill." Stillman, a member of a committee that recommended against no net fill, hedged when asked by Mayor Anne Magnie whether he supported "no net fill" or not.

"Every bit of fill has a cumulative impact," Stillman said.

A "no net fill" ordinance would require developers to make up for fill added to the floodplain by extracting an equal amount from a "borrow site" along the laguna floodplain.

"Where is the borrow area?" Councilman Richard Johnson wanted to know. So far no site has been designated.

Another argument against "no net fill" is that it would cause a financial burden to those developers who build within the 76-foot

floodplain along the Laguna.

"That's just the point," said Kim Cordell of Boyle Engineering who spoke from the audience. "This is what it ("no net fill") was designed to do in order to discourage development."

Cordell said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would probably take the "no net fill" issue out of the council's power, once the Army Corps of Engineers designates the area as a floodway, as opposed to a floodplain.

City Council and staff had hoped that lands within the city limits would be exempt from the floodway designation, which would require no net fill for developments. However, Cordell, whose company works closely with FEMA, said it is unlikely Sebastopol would be excluded.

Magnie said she had favored the "no net fill" ordinance until the committee discovered it would only subtract one-eighth of an inch from the floodplain level.

Cordell disagreed. "Do you have a moral right to say let's save the Laguna except for the parts within Sebastopol?"

Councilman Bill Roventini, long an advocate against no net fill for

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Laguna...

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preventing evaporation and keeping the water cool and plentiful.

Another factor in the water quality of the laguna is pollution from the municipal sewage plants, which have been discharging water into the laguna since 1924.

Excessive nutrients from sewage, dairy wastes and run-off fertilizer from farmlands has entered the laguna and caused algal growth and eutrophication (lack of oxygen).

Meanwhile, the loss of riparian forest and trees which served as nesting grounds for wildlife and birds has caused certain species, such as the red tail hawk, to leave the area.

One of Cox's goals is to bring back the flowing stream of the laguna, at least partially, by making

ponds with check dams. With more water and plants, the area could be used as a wildlife farm, he said.

Cox reported that in Oregon, a stream that used to support trout, but dried up in the summer, was brought back through exclusion fencing to keep cattle out. After several years, Cox said the willows grew back and the stream was actively flowing with plenty of water to support fish.

Even at present the laguna harbors a multitude of plant and animal life. The channels serve as prime feeding grounds for herons and egrets, the marsh supports ducks and coots, the grasslands contain pheasant and meadowlarks and the woodlands contain owls, mice deer and raccoons.

As for plant life, the freshwater marshes that are left contain rushes and dockweed, the riparian wood