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Little League agrees on new Sebastopol site

Laguna ballpark lacks city support

By CLARK MASON
Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — It grew into a campaign issue, but the struggle for a new Little League ballfield ended in a truce this week when league officials offered to try to build the diamond away from a proposed nature park along the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

The proposed diamond near the Laguna appeared to lack support from a majority of City Council members, even though it was favored by most of the candidates in this fall's council race.

A league representative told the council at a public hearing Tuesday that her group would try to build the field at nearby Analy High School if the city would lend its

support. The council agreed to help by naming members Nick Stewart and Richard Johnson to talk with Analy and league officials. Then the officials voted unanimously to approve a master plan for reviving the Laguna — a plan that excludes the new ballpark.

Mindy Marshall, a Sebastopol Little League representative, said it would cost at least twice as much to build the much-needed Little League field at Analy, compared to adding a third baseball diamond to Laguna Youth Park, the site of the city's old sewer ponds.

The cost to add another field to the two existing ones at Laguna Youth Park is \$25,000, compared to \$50,000 to \$60,000 to build the field at Analy, she said.

The Sebastopol Little League, which has 1,200 kids, is in dire need of the extra baseball diamond to serve its "Senior League" of 13-to-

18-year-old youths and has long counted on building it next to the Laguna, Marshall said.

Despite the extra expense of building at Analy, she said building on that site would end controversy and enable the league to gain the whole community's support. Analy officials are receptive to the Little League's proposal, she said.

Just as the Little League needs more diamonds, supporters for more "passive" uses for the Laguna park say students of all ages need environmental learning sites. They also believe a revitalized Laguna will draw tourists to Sebastopol and generate significant sales tax revenues.

The city's long-term plans for the Laguna encompass about 325 acres on the east side of Sebastopol. The \$1.3 million plan — which lacks a certain source of financing at this point — calls for seeding and replanting, recreational trails, buff-

er zones to protect against encroaching development and the re-establishment of freshwater marshes.

The city Planning Commission last summer unanimously recommended against allowing a new ballfield near the lagoon, preferring the same site be used instead for a small amphitheater.

Before Marshall's mention of the Analy compromise, a parade of City Council candidates in next month's election urged the council Tuesday night to allow a new field next to the Laguna.

Those in support of the ballpark included candidates Jim Chess, Yvonne Cornelius, Ken Foley, Tom Miller and Howard Reeser.

Candidates Howard Levy and Mayor Stewart — who is up for re-election — had opposed a new field next to the Laguna.

While voting in favor of the *See Ballpark, Page B3*

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laguna plan, both council members Johnson and Bill Roventini said they did not want to rule out a ballpark there if the Analy High option falls through.

Marshall asked the city to help the Little League with technical details and perhaps permission to use part of a city right-of-way when it reconfigures Analy's varsity baseball field to accommodate a new diamond. "We are not asking for money from the city," she said.

Stewart said the "silver lining" to the controversy is that the dire need for playing fields and other recreational needs has been highlighted. He said Sebastopol and Sonoma County officials are embarking on a joint study to assess recreational needs, with the hope of developing another park site in the city.