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# Sebastopol wetlands get a boost

## County open space panel adds support

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Staff Writer

The Sonoma County open space district has agreed to help a drive to preserve property next to the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands in Sebastopol.

Palm Terrace, a proposed development of 18 homes on 8.5 acres on the east side of town, has been the subject of controversy and litigation for nearly 12 years. Earlier this year, the property owners agreed to sell the land for a wildlife refuge and perhaps a Native American cultural center for \$1.5 million.

Community activists and environmentalists began a fund-raising campaign but organizers say they still have a long way to go. Last week, however, the 17-member

Open Space Advisory Committee voted unanimously to work with the community in pursuing a conservation agreement on the property.

"We don't see ourselves as the deep pockets on this one, but we're going to help get this done," said David Hansen, general manager of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. "This is a significant piece of property with the wetlands and clearly it is important to the community."

Hansen said he did not know how much the district could offer toward the effort but said it probably will not be more than half of the property's costs and might be less.

An appraisal is being prepared on the land and when completed later this month, Hansen said his agency would become more actively involved.

Juliana Doms, co-chairwoman of the fund drive, said that despite the committee's vote she remains

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PRESS DEMOCRAT GRAPHIC

## Wetlands

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cautiously optimistic the property will finally be saved.

"The indications are real good, it seems that a lot of people are supporting us," said Doms. "Clearly, we've got our foot in the door."

Bill Haigwood, a real estate agent who is the other co-chairman of the preservation effort, said he wants the land saved but also wants to be sure the property owners receive fair compensation.

"I support the subdivision up until the time I learned that the owners would be willing to sell," he explained. "I've insisted that if the public wants private lands, they've got to pay for it."

Palm Terrace has been at various times over the years the proposed site for a variety of condominium, housing and office proposals.

Native Americans also have claimed the homes were going into an area where their ancestors once lived. Researchers have since found no human remains, but a search this year did result in the discovery of an archeological site with fragments of obsidian, mortars, pestles, hammer stones and projectile points.

Haigwood said the committee has hired an appraiser to evaluate the property to see if the \$1.5 million purchase price is warranted and he expects the work to be done within a few weeks. Once the appraisal is done, staff of the open space district will begin more formal negotiations and analysis to see how much the district would be willing to spend.

The district, created by voters in 1990 and funded with a quarter-cent sales tax, has preserved more than 15,000 acres over the last five years.

*Staff writer Clark Mason contributed to this story.*