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EMPIRE

California, Thursday, September 21, 1995

Sebastopol OKs project on Indian site

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SEBASTOPOL — Saying it was unfair to expect a property owner to keep his land undeveloped because of its significance to the American Indian community, a divided City Council has approved the first phase of an 18-home development next to the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Indians said building the Palm Terrace subdivision on the archaeological site and possible burial ground was a "shameful desecration." One speaker, Alexis Canillo, called it "a tragic epilogue to the history of native people of Sonoma County — a history laden with genocide, slavery and cultural desecration."

A majority of City Council members said Tuesday it had little choice but to approve Palm Terrace, which has been on the drawing board for more than a dozen years and which probably

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has been reviewed more than any other project in city history.

"Is there anyone in the room who is living on property that hasn't been taken away from Native Americans?" Mayor Bill Roventini asked before joining Councilmen Ken Foley and Sam Crump in voting for the project.

Roventini said it was unfair to single out Palm Terrace property owners "for the ills of the rest of us." He said there had been significant compromise by property owners George Young, Yolanda Ghilotti and their families, who reduced the project significantly from original proposals.

Council members Anne Magnie and Howard Levy, who voted against the project, said it was a sad day for Sebastopol and "a good

day for lawyers."

The city was capitulating, Levy said, because it was afraid of a costly lawsuit by developers.

Opponents of Palm Terrace decried the effect the large-lot, two-story homes will have on the sensitive Laguna and its wildlife.

Environmentalist Juliana Doms threatened to sue the city if it approved Palm Terrace. She said the city should postpone the project at least until the possibility of raising money to buy the land for open space could be explored.

The Sonoma County Agriculture Preservation and Open Space District has expressed its intent to buy the larger Saddleburr property adjacent to Palm Terrace if matching funds can be obtained, but declined to get involved with Palm Terrace because it was the subject of litigation.

The Palm Terrace property owners sued Sebastopol last year after their development was rejected by the City Council. In an



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attempt to avoid a costly court fight, city officials negotiated for about a year and came up with the compromise 18-home plan that is now the subject of public review.

While the compromise was being negotiated, Councilwoman Lynn Hamilton, who opposed Palm Terrace, left the council. She was replaced by Crump, who voted in favor of the project.