

Grant going for Indian site

Pomos object to Sebastopol plan

By TOM CHORNEAU
Staff Writer

Despite emotional objections from American Indians, Sonoma County supervisors unanimously agreed Tuesday to make a \$900,000 grant toward the preservation of Palm Terrace, an eight-acre parcel in Sebastopol.

The property, which could be developed into 18 luxury homes, has long been the subject of controversy because of its environmental resources and the fact that it is a cherished Indian

historical site.

Yet it was representatives of a local Pomo tribe that most objected to the conservation plan, saying they have been left out of the process by organizers.

In an action punctuated by irony, supervisors decided to support the plan — primarily because of the historical importance of the land to the tribe.

"I came in skeptical about this proposal, but what turned me around was the feeling among the Native Americans that this land has significance," said Supervisor Mike Cale. "I couldn't live with myself if I didn't support this plan and allowed the property to be developed."

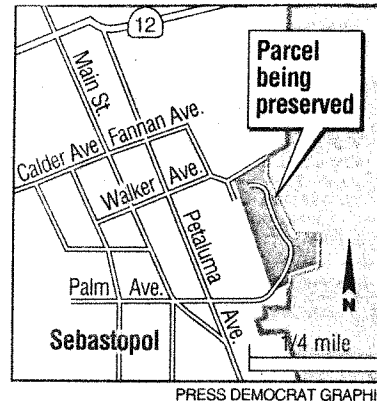
In a father twist, Ray Fallis, vice

chairman of the Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Education and Development Center in Forestville, said a chief complaint is that the conservation plan calls for building a cultural center on the site, highlighting the history of the Pomos who once lived there.

"We don't want any building on the property," he said. "Leaving it natural means leaving it natural."

Fallis also said that local Pomos were angry about not being consulted during the development of the plan, and that they want assurances they will be given a role in managing and overseeing the project.

Under the terms approved by the supervisors, a private nonprofit land conservation group will



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receive \$900,000 of open space tax money toward a \$1.5 million deal to buy the property from the landowner.

LandWrights, the conservation group organized by leading west county environmentalists, now has until May 1 to come up with
See Indian, Page B2

Continued from Page B1

another \$75,000 to meet fund-raising obligations agreed to with the property owners, according to Joan Vilms, spokeswoman for the group.

"I feel very optimistic that we can work things out with the Native Americans," Vilms said. "There's been some major misunderstandings but we need to go on from here."

Vilms said the owners, Yolanda Ghilotti and her family, have given the group up to two years to pay off the balance of the purchase price.

If the group is unable to complete its part of the bargain, the open space money will be returned to the county and the owners of the property would be free to develop the land, said Maria Cipriani, planner of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

Palm Terrace is just west of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, one of the county's most important ecological preserves. Proponents of the deal say the Palm Terrace property will provide additional educational opportunities for students of both the environment and Indian culture.

Supervisor Ernie Carpenter, whose district includes the Sebastopol area, said he hopes the two sides can come together over the project.

"I'm very sorry about the split that has taken place here," he said. "It doesn't have to happen. But if the board does not act, there's an approved plan for 18 homes out there and they will be built."