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Sonoma West April 9, 1997

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EDITORIAL

Ill-advised move to alter Laguna committee

It was probably not one of Sebastopol Mayor Sam Crump's most inspired ideas. In a move more arbitrary than well-reasoned, Crump attempted last week to remove Sebastopol Tomorrow's representation on the Laguna Implementation Committee.

As the city's most visible and active environmental group, and the original promoters of the idea of a Laguna Park, Sebastopol Tomorrow is a fitting and obvious choice to be represented on such a committee. The group's views are representative of many Sebastopol residents. To exclude their views by way of eliminating Sebastopol Tomorrow's place on the committee is ill-advised and contradictory to the principles of representative government. Local government should encourage participation at every level; whether it is the City Council, Planning Commission or an ad hoc committee to make sure a park gets built.

The work of Sebastopol Tomorrow on the Laguna Park Implementation Committee has not been questioned, nor are we aware of any complaints about their work on the Laguna Park. So where exactly is the rub?

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To remove Sebastopol Tomorrow based on some vague notion of "accountability" could have a very detrimental effect on citizen participation in government activities. Whose standards of accountability and credibility are to be used when deciding committee memberships? Raising the notion that a group or individual meet some arbitrary standard of credibility puts the City Council on a slippery slope with regard to future committee appointments.

Fortunately, a majority of the City Council prevailed and Crump's proposal was defeated. Regardless of any political motivation behind the attempt, such a discussion should have taken place at the policy level, and not singled out any individual group. We hope future discussions on city-appointed committees concern themselves with increasing access to the democratic process rather than excluding any individuals or group from participation.

Sonoma West April 9, 1997 —B.W.D.