

Laguna golf plans shelved by Santa Rosa

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SANTA ROSA — With Sebastopol environmentalists gearing up for a heated battle, plans for an 18-hole golf course in the Laguna de Santa Rosa were shelved by a Santa Rosa committee last week.

"We didn't even have a chance to get organized," said Mike Kyes, a Sebastopol resident and Laguna advocate.

The committee appointed by the Santa Rosa City Council last week abandoned plans for a golf course on the Kelly Farm, a 320-acre parcel between Highway 12 and Occidental Road owned by the city and used for wastewater irrigation.

But plans to build a golf course on the site, which is just east of the city of Sebastopol, were met with stiff opposition by environmentalists, including Sebastopol Tomorrow and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation.

Environmentalists had pledged a joint legal challenge to defeat the golf plans, and Santa Rosa officials decided it was not worth the fight, according to Sebastopol Mayor Kathy Austin, who attended last week's committee meeting.

"I think it's a wise decision," she said. "I think they realized that they didn't want to get into a protracted legal situation ... I don't think they realized the extent of the negative feeling people have ... they didn't want to waste their time and money, they just wanted to get a golf course built."

Santa Rosa's decision was roundly praised west of the Laguna. "The Laguna Foundation commends Mayor Sharon Wright and members of the golf study committee for responding to the information advanced by the foundation and interested citizens with regard to the eco- (Please see Golf page A9)

May 13-19
Sonoma West Times & News

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98.26

Golf ...

98.26

(Continued from front page)

logical and economic importance of the Laguna, which is a real treasure for Sonoma County," said Bill Haigwood, president of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation.

Fifth District Supervisor Mike Reilly also praised the decision. "It's a positive decision of Santa Rosa not to want to have an acrimonious battle

with the West County ... it's a great day for the Laguna."

The committee was expected to make its recommendation to the Santa Rosa City Council this week, and recommend that the city consider a dairy ranch south of Santa Rosa on Petaluma Hill Road for a golf course.

"We can be supportive of a golf course in Sonoma County, as long as it is anywhere but in the Laguna," said Haigwood. Kyes said the battle over golf

in the Laguna, and recent reports of plans for a school on the Saddleburr property, illustrate the lack of understanding that exists about the Laguna.

"People still don't respect the value of the land in its natural state," he said.

Haigwood concurred. "The Laguna is not a vacant lot on which to build a golf course or a school," he said.

He also hoped that the golf course issue will heighten awareness of the Laguna's

value among elected officials. Sebastopol City Council members were criticized for not actively opposing the golf course plans.

"In as much as it was the City Council that authorized the first Laguna study committee, I would speak more in sorrow than in anger that the Council members have not been made aware of the importance of the Laguna, as many of our citizens have in the past 10 to 15 years," said Haigwood. "I hope this is

the last time that any Council member fails to actively support the restoration and preservation of the Laguna."

Austin said she was opposed to the golf course plans, but said that "our city is made up of a lot of different people."

She said other Council members "wanted to see more information before they made a decision ... but I disagreed with that conclusion. I didn't think it was worth going forward with the EIR."