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## School's Laguna site lambasted

by Barry W. Dugan  
Sonoma West Editor

SEBASTOPOL — School trustees took the Sebastopol Independent Charter School to task last week over its plans to build a school along the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

And when Sebastopol Union School District trustees were done, local environmentalists joined the chorus of criticism for the charter school's plans to purchase the 31-acre Saddlebur property, a key link in the city's plans for a Laguna park.

Until it was reported by Sonoma West, trustees said they knew nothing of the plans.

Trustee Lisa Dawson said "It was quite disturbing to me what land you were looking at, and to find out via the paper."

Greg Haynes, director of the Sebastopol Independent see *Laguna* page A3

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dependent Charter School, said "It was not my intent to have it come out that way."

But Dawson said it was more than the way she heard the news, it was the project itself.

"Was there some thought that this was a sensitive site for Sebastopol?" she said. "I think you picked the most sensitive site."

"We are desperate," Haynes said. He said the charter school has been searching for years for a permanent site for its school, which could eventually include grades K-8. "We've looked at so many sites," he said. "It's been the most grueling, frustrating process possible ... our issue is we have a task to create an educational opportunity."

Dawson told Haynes that she was "one of your biggest supporters" when the school was founded three years ago. "It

dumfounds me that you have picked this site. I am shocked. It's a blow to me."

Haynes responded that "we realize how sensitive people are about this property," and that he was asking to withdraw a request to the board to allow the charter school board to be the lead agency for an environmental impact report.

He said the school intends to meet with community groups and see if a plan can be developed that would draw community support. "There is no way we will succeed if we can't get some support," said Haynes. "If we can't get that support we'll move on."

Trustee Chris Castillo said "I need to ditto what Lisa said. Selection of a site in that area that means so much to this town ... is appalling to me."

Haynes asked the board: "You don't think we should pursue this property?"

"I just don't see how it will work," said Dawson. "Personally, I'm opposed to it," said Castillo.

Trustee Carole Hudlow told Haynes "I think it was a real mistake to leave us out of the loop. This is a piece of land that has practically become sacred."

Haynes said he would like to meet with community groups, and "if people feel so adamant that is it out of the question, I've got to reassess if it's even worth it."

Jude Kreissman, a Park Side School teacher and local environmentalist, told Haynes that "everybody empathizes with your search ... but I hope you abandon the site."

Planning Commissioner and Laguna activist Helen Shane read an impassioned speech, telling the school's parents that "I cannot comprehend how you will be able to explain to your children that a particular site for their school had a higher priority for you than the health and welfare of the wholeness of the Laguna ... Will you tell your children that concern for the environment is good only when it doesn't conflict with one's own plans?"