

\$900,000 Unocal deal moves ahead

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The Guadalupe City council agreed Tuesday night to draft a proposal to accept more than \$900,000 in benefits from Chevron once the company begins trucking contaminated soil through town on its way to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill.

The council voted 4-0, with Councilman Carlos Aguilera abstaining, to allow staff to move forward to draft an agreement with the oil company.

The proposal would include a one-time donation of \$250,000 to improve the recreation fields at Jack O'Connell Park; \$31,200 a year for five years to fund crossing guards at key points along Highway 1; and \$100,000 for two full-time firefighters for five years.

Also in the agreement is a stipulation that trucks reduce their speed through town. Caltrans has requested the company fund a stop at the intersection of Highways 1 and 166.

With the council approval, the city attorney and city engineer will look over the language of the agreement to make sure the final document protects the city. Neither the city attorney nor the city engineer was involved in the initial talks between Mayor Lupe Alvarez and Chevron officials.

Chevron is looking at using Highway 1 to haul the thousands of truck loads of contaminated sand from a Unocal clean-up site in San Luis Obispo County. Unocal was bought by Chevron, who is now overseeing the project.

The oil company has been working to clean up the Nipomo-Guadalupe Dunes site since 1990, and officials plan to move 860,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil over five years from the site to the Santa Maria Regional Landfill. The landfill, east of Santa Maria on Main Street, has been permitted to accept this type of soil.

Santa Maria officials will use the contaminated sand, officially called nonhazardous impacted soil, as a capping layer to close the landfill. For taking the sand from the site, Santa Maria expects millions of dollars in fees paid by Chevron.

However, the project has been stalled since March when a group of Santa Maria residents appealed to the California Coastal Commission. The commission is slated to decide Thursday whether they will hear the appeal.

Chevron is also still meeting with the county to work on obtaining permits needed to move trucks on county roads.

The council discussed the agreement before about 65 residents. Many in the audience were uniformed members of the volunteer fire department, and many

others were affiliated with the Guadalupe Youth Football team who brought their children to show support for the recreation component of the deal.

Sal Reynoso, with the volunteer fire department, quieted the room when he urged the council to accept the agreement by describing how two full-time firefighters could help the department with response time.

"There is an urgency to get a full-time firefighter," he said, pointing out that when dealing with injuries, minutes can be the difference between life, brain damage or death.

Though many were in favor of the deal, others questioned how the project would impact businesses along Highway 1, the road condition and the community's health.

However, Alvaraez, the city's main architect of the agreement, pointed out the company has fulfilled Caltrans' requirements for the project and could use the highway with or without city approval.

Aguilera tested Kyle Rutherford, the Chevron representative, to see if the company would be willing to fund the entire fire department to go full time or increase the amount of stipend the volunteers are given.

But that idea was not embraced by the council and Rutherford said he was not at the meeting to negotiate but to present the current agreement.

Aguilera did not state a reason for abstaining from the council vote.