

UC historian rejuvenates hopes for shelter by calling regents

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SANTA CRUZ — A telephone call from noted university historian Page Smith to UC Regents' offices in Berkeley Friday helped buy two weeks of hope and challenge for persistent supporters of a homeless shelter project on property owned by the university at River Street and Highway 1.

Without the call to the real estate division of the UC Regents Treasurer, and a follow-up call from city officials, the shelter property would have been offered for sale to the public, opening chances for shelter opponents or other private interests to buy the 1.4-acre site.

Smith, an ardent shelter supporter

and secretary of the Citizens Committee for the Homeless, persuaded the treasurer's office to allow more time for the city to come up with a more competitive offer for the property since its original, undisclosed bid was rejected.

Now, the pressure is on Smith and other shelter supporters to come up with about \$100,000 in the next two weeks to bolster the city's offer.

If the money is raised, the City Council would have to vote by Nov. 18 on whether to amend its offer to include the \$100,000. A week later, the council is scheduled to decide whether to uphold an October Zoning Board decision approving a permit for the shelter.

If there is no amendment to the

city's offer to the university, then the property will be offered for public sale by the university through a sealed bidding process Nov. 21, said City Manager Richard Wilson.

Shelter opponents have already vowed to try to buy the property if it goes to public bid.

In a press release issued Friday, Wilson reported the university had "offered to defer the public-bid process until Nov. 21.

"This would enable local shelter proponents an opportunity to seek \$100,000 in contributions to augment the city's current proposal to the university," stated Wilson. Wilson did not name Smith, but commented

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"shelter proponents" had "intervened" to influence the university's stance.

De Weese remarked, "Apparently there is a group coming up with some more money to be added to the kitty. We granted the (two-week) extension to give them (shelter supporters and the city) some breathing room."

Commented Shelter Project Coordinator Brindel: "We have two weeks to come up with guarantees (for the money.) We're shouting out into the world, 'Help us out!'"

Smith remarked Sunday he is still not sure the university has ruled out the possibility of selling the land to the city for less than the appraised value.

"I do think the university's role should be more than just a real estate agent. There should be consideration for humanitarian issues," he added.

Nevertheless, the professor said he plans to start today "the big undertaking" of raising the money.

"We'll obviously start appealing to everyone who has been interested and helping with the shelter (project) to ask them to give something additional," Smith said.

Brindel hopes all the weight of the fund-raising challenge doesn't fall only on the shoulders of the Citizens Committee or the Shelter Project. The Shelter Project is an affiliate of Democratic Management Services, the non-profit, tax-exempt group selected to run the shelter. County supervisors have agreed to pay half the costs of the shelter, if the city acquires the property. The property is appraised at \$580,000. The annual operations' costs are estimated at \$106,000.

"We're willing to take up the challenge but everyone is going to have to help us pull it off," said Brindel.

Brindel said he wasn't quite sure how the fund-raising efforts would begin. Besides cash donations, one

possibility under discussion is to persuade homeowners to offer equity in their houses.

He said it would be a benefit to shelter project contributors to make donations before Jan. 1 so they can benefit from existing tax laws, subject to change at the first of the year.

Last Monday, Smith, Brindel and other shelter supporters had met in private with Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt and Mayor Michael Rotkin about prospects for the shelter. By that time, it appeared alternatives to the River Street acquisition would have to be pursued.

Wormhoudt, a member of a city-county shelter subcommittee, has taken the lead in the city council's efforts to acquire the shelter. Rotkin said he was sitting in at the meeting for Councilman John Laird, who could not attend. Laird and County Supervisors' Chairman Gary Patton are also members of the city-county subcommittee.

At that meeting, Citizens Committee members said they tried to persuade the city to amend its offer to the university, based on a promise from the Committee that they could raise an additional \$100,000 over a period of time.

But city officials said they could not amend the offer, without guarantees the money was in hand.

Also attending the meeting was Jack Baskin, a major UC Santa Cruz benefactor who donated \$1 million toward a just-opened computer engineering and information-systems center on campus. Baskin has agreed to donate \$25,000 toward the shelter project.

Following last Monday's meeting, Baskin commented he believed the Citizens Committee has its heart in the right place but said their offer to the city had "no substance."

"It's very easy to say you're going to raise \$10 million. But they didn't identify \$10 dollars at that meeting.

"I'm sure they would use their best efforts to raise the money but it's tough to raise money."