

GROWTH

Supervisors set growth rate of 1.5 percent

By JAMIE MARKS
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Wayne Moore stunned his fellow board members Tuesday with a bold proposal for a three-month moratorium on building permits.

The idea met with utter silence momentarily. Ultimately, it proved too radical for the majority of supervisors, who instead voted 3-2 to lower the growth rate by one-half percent to 1.5 percent, until a report on water supply and a Capital Improvements Plan are finished.

The 1.5-percent growth rate will allow 757 housing permits for 1985.

Supervisors Moore and Dan Forbus cast the dissenting votes, but for different reasons.

Moore said, "The problem is not the question of growth rate, but of bringing the Planning Department into an agency that can function well."

Moore's call for a moratorium left Forbus so dumbfounded he could only shake his head and say, "Get me off this merry-

go-round." Moore and Forbus are conservative allies on most issues.

"I don't know where you're going, Wayne... If you would have talked to me about it, I wouldn't have let you in the door," said Forbus.

In setting an "interim" growth rate of 1.5 percent, supervisors struck the middle chord on the scale of proposals before them. On the high end was the Planning Department's 2-percent rate, on the low end was the Planning Commission's recommendation for a 1-percent rate.

Under Measure J, the growth-management system passed by voters in 1978, the board annually sets the course of growth by determining a rate that limits the number of building permits.

Dave Laughlin, chief of comprehensive planning, said of the 757 permits, 537 are earmarked for urban and 250 for rural areas. That figure is down from the nearly 1,000 permits that would have been issued if the rate was set at 2 percent.

Two of 10 speakers urged the board to maintain the 2-percent rate. One, a small

builder, the other, a property owner, said their chances of building would be hampered by a permit reduction.

But the majority of those at the hearing called for a lowering of the rate to 1 percent. From the Live Oak Community Association to the Sierra Club, speakers told of archaic road systems, increasing traffic congestion and a deterioration in the quality of life in Santa Cruz County.

Chairwoman Robley Levy was the first to propose a 1.5-percent rate, saying "I certainly believe we must reduce our

growth rate. Two percent is no constraint at all," she said, referring to Planning Department figures showing that building permits are available in urban parts of the county.

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara backed her, saying it "cuts the middle ground and it's a defensible position."

Forbus listed a variety of reasons why he wouldn't support it. He noted the board had set a long-term growth rate of 2

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percent for 1982-90 and said, "We're going back on our word."

Also, he said, "I have a little problem listening to the three of you talk of controlling growth." For years, he said, the majority has approved project after project for the Live Oak area. "Now that it's back in your neighborhood, you want to control growth."

"That's a myth. You're not controlling growth — you're just controlling the number of houses people go in."

Planning Director Kris Schenk had cautioned supervisors to consider the legal ramifications of a low growth rate. The courts, he said, have ruled the county has to accept its "fair share of growth."

The state forecast for growth is 1.65 percent. The estimations for the county's population increase range between 1.9 percent (Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments) and 2.2 percent (Department of Finance).

Lowering the rate means less money will come in from development, noted Schenk.

Moore's idea was the boldest of any proposed in Tuesday afternoon's public hearing on the growth rate. After the meeting, he said, "It came to me while I was sleeping."

"We've heard numerous people come before the board saying they're lost in a sea of bureaucracy down there," said Moore. "I think we should close down the Planning Department ... and direct them to get their act together."

"Sometimes you have to take one step backward to take two steps forward," said the Pajaro Valley supervisor, adding he

thinks planning is nearing the point where "you get the straw that breaks the camel's back."

Moore suggested closing the department until April 1, to give planners time to revamp the cumbersome bureaucracy and devise a Capital Improvement Plan that will determine which public-works projects will be done. After that, Moore said, the board could establish a 2-percent growth rate, which would average out to a yearly rate of 1.75 percent.

Although the idea held some appeal for Supervisors Gary Patton, Cucchiara and Levy, it died for lack of a second.

Through peels of laughter from the audience, Forbus told Moore, "I don't know what horse you're on."

Patton said he's "been a proponent of having a building moratorium to revamp the planning system," but he cautioned it's a "very complicated matter" that would need careful planning.

Levy said she wanted "a little more focus" from Moore before she would endorse the idea. "I'm concerned the proposal being advanced (to close the department) ... would throw many people's lives, their businesses ... into complete turmoil."

The idea has historical precedent. In January 1979 the Planning Department closed for a week of reorganization. Later the schedule was revised to one day of closing, then a half-day a week, which is still the schedule.

Moore predicted that unless the department is fully reorganized, supervisors will find themselves facing the same predicament next year. "We go on and on and on for years with all the complaints and nothing ever gets done," he said.