

Aptos hills building boom spurs moratorium request

A building boom has been quietly taking place on the shaded slopes of Cathedral and Redwood Drives in Aptos.

In the last seven months, more than 40 building permits have been issued for new homes in a 3½-mile segment of Mangels Gulch extending from the new post office to the top of Redwood Drive.

In contrast, 45 building permits were issued in the area from January, 1975 to December, 1976.

A newly-formed homeowners association plans to ask Santa Cruz County supervisors next Tuesday for building constraints or, as a last resort, a building moratorium.

"We are interested in establishing environmental and publicly-reasonable guidelines for the area," says Dr. Wells Shoemaker, a Watsonville physician and acting chairman of the Cathedral-Redwood Association of Citizens.

"Haphazard growth has already caused a lot of problems."

The area is an old subdivision, laid out in the 1920s, he said. "Many of the lots are 4,000 to

6,000 square feet in size. These lots, according to current county ordinances, would not be buildable and would not tolerate septic tanks."

But, he adds, they are buildable today because of a "grandfather" clause in the county law.

Builders have turned to the area because there is a shortage of buildable lots elsewhere in the county.

"It is very difficult to find land with water and utilities," he added.

"The impact," Dr. Shoemaker continued, "is very threatening to the area."

Adverse impacts include water quality, including "the ability of these soil types to tolerate the additional septic tank burden and the increased erosion and siltation from further grading," he said.

"The creek is already polluted and has very high fecal coliform counts. It can only get worse." (Fecal coliform, a type of bacteria found in human and animal waste products, are a standard test for contamination of surface water supplies.)

Other problems outlined by Dr. Shoemaker include the increased fire liability and the road access problems.

The Association's goals are to "preserve the environmental integrity of the area and ensure the safety of the residents.

"We are most definitely not anti-growth," he emphasized. "We are interested in managed and responsible growth. We are not opposed to growth per se."

A building moratorium would be sought from the supervisors only if other controls are not immediately possible, he said.

Dr. Shoemaker sees problems coming from a moratorium. "It is a temporary solution, penalizing people with responsible proposals as well as irresponsible proposals.

"It also engenders a lot of emotionalism that distracts people from the real issue.

"The moratorium would be a temporary, viable alternative if the planning department staff is so overworked that they just could not respond to these issues in the near future."

The homeowners group met with county officials on July 7 to discuss their concerns.

County employes, the association spokesman said, "acknowledged the realism of our concerns but without specific direction from the board of supervisors, they would be dealing with it on a penny-ante basis."

Shoemaker said supervisors will be asked for "guidelines for future responsible growth.

"We will give a list of specific suggestions and recommendations using existing personnel and pathways. We are not asking for the world."

The group has the support of

Aptos Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat — up to a point.

She was not available for comment.

Administrative aide Elinor Baldwin said Mrs. Liddicoat is not in favor of a building moratorium.

"She is not in favor of a building moratorium because if it is done in our district, it should be done in many others," Mrs. Baldwin added.

"She does feel it is a unique issue because of the value of Cathedral and Redwood Drives."

The supervisor does believe the residents there face a problem that should be dealt with, however.

The area is served by the Soquel Creek County Water District past the Monte Toyon Camp, and then by a privately-owned water company along the upper stretches of Redwood Drive.

There is no sewer service in the area.