

County sets 1-percent growth rate

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7-20-88

SANTA CRUZ — Defying the will of the state Department of Housing and Community Development, county supervisors Tuesday set a 1-percent residential growth rate for 1988.

The board's action, with Live Oak-Soquel Supervisor Dan Forbus the sole dissenter in the 4-1 vote, affirmed an earlier recommendation by the county Planning Commission.

Housing and Community Development officials warned last year that if the county failed to adopt a 2-percent growth rate in 1988, its General Plan "housing element" would no longer comply with state law. And if that were to happen, they warned, the county would lose its eligibility for state-administered federal community development block grant funds.

But Assistant Planning Director Tom Burns told supervisors Tuesday that it hardly matters what Sacramento officials say, since they aren't likely to approve any more

block grant money for the county in any case.

Supervisors must set an annual cap on the number of new residential construction permits under Measure J, the county's growth-management ordinance.

The 1-percent rate approved Tuesday will allow the county to issue an additional 489 permits in 1988. Supervisors adopted a 1-percent growth rate in 1987.

County Builders Exchange spokeswoman Patti Bonar said that a 1-percent cap on permits would push already high housing prices still further, pricing people of modest means out of the market and shifting a disproportionate share of the demand for low-cost housing onto the city of Watsonville.

Environmental activist Hal Levin said, meanwhile, that the county should set a zero growth rate in 1988. Levin said residential growth limits had failed to check population growth. He said new permits should be issued this year from a pool of more than 1,300 "surplus" permits, which have accumulated

over the years as the board has authorized the issuance of more permits than have actually been requested.

Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy, who is up for re-election this fall, strongly endorsed the 1-percent rate.

"What we should be looking at is what level of growth the people of this community want to see," she said. "The message I've been getting is: 'less growth and less growth and less growth.'"

Forbus, who is also defending his seat this fall, was uncharacteristically silent, casting his lone "no" vote without comment.

In past years, the board's growth-rate hearing has been an occasion for spirited verbal jousting between the conservative Forbus and his liberal foil, Third District Supervisor Gary Patton.

Asked why he had held his tongue Tuesday, Forbus replied, "I've said it for five years and nobody has listened, and it was 4 o'clock and nobody was going to listen today."