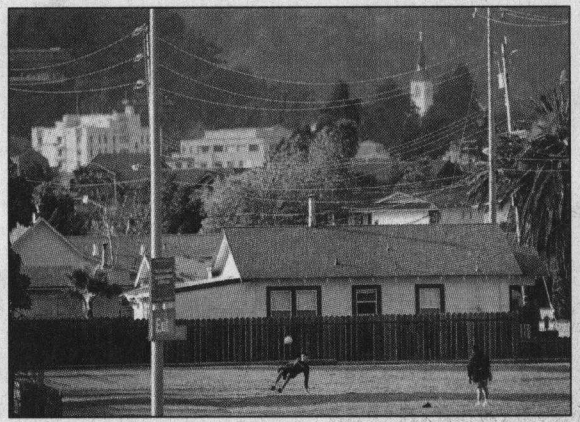


# Medical clinic proposed for Beach Flats



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Beach Flats resident Angelica Marquez would welcome a clinic in her neighborhood, shown at top

## Groups await word on funding for plan

*Beach Flats*

By **HEATHER BOERNER**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

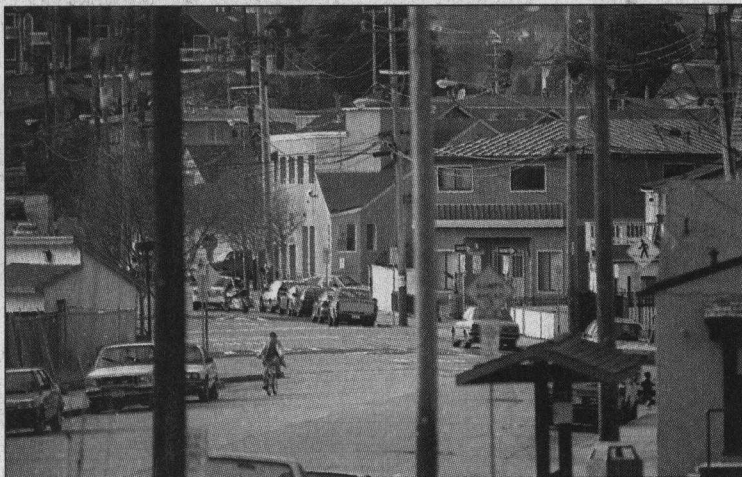
SANTA CRUZ — It's been years since Angelica Marquez has been to a doctor. And it's not that she hasn't been sick.

"I do it myself," she said, watching over her nephew and niece in Beach Flats Park Thursday. "It's been awhile."

Marquez, like many of the 1,200 residents of this mostly poor and Latino neighborhood in the shadow of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, has little money for baby-sitters, little time to get to the clinic that's two bus rides away, and less patience for the reams of paperwork, probing questions and English-only speaking doctors. So she will only take her kids to the doctor when they get sick and when she does, she opts for folk remedies.

But Salud Para La Gente, a South County health center, and Mercy Charities Housing, which is building an apartment, child care and community center complex in the neighborhood, aim to change that.

By spring the two groups should know if they have received the money that will allow them to plan for a clinic just two blocks from where Marquez is watching her nephew Andy



The pink building, center, is the proposed site of a medical clinic in Beach Flats.

2-19-02

bounce a basketball. Mercy Charities already manages the La Playa office building at the corner of Riverside Drive and Liebrandt Street, said Mercy's Executive Director Elizabeth Vogel.

"Often people learn to live with a discomfort," said Roy Jimenez, director of health services at Salud Para La Gente. "They have a pain here, or a pain there, and they do their

folk medicine, and they hope that and God will get them through. That kind of spirituality can raise spirits, but we say having a clinic in your neighborhood can do even more."

Residents like Marquez are young and strong, but others, such as Beach Flats residents with chronic diseases such as diabetes, face life-threatening problems. Two of every

Please see **CLINIC** on **BACK PAGE**

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ROY JIMENEZ, DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES, SALUD PARA LA GENTE

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three Beach Flats residents don't have health insurance, according to a study released by Mercy Charities Housing this month.

Nearly half of all residents have chronic health problems such as diabetes, anemia, back pain and allergies.

Yolanda Goda, director of the nearby Familia Center, said a woman came into her center recently, piqued and pale. She was diabetic, and because she didn't have the money for medicine, she had been using her insulin sparingly. It had gone bad; she was being poisoned by it. When the staff offered to take her to Dominican Hospital's emergency room, she resisted, afraid of the cost.

Like most people who don't have health insurance, Beach Flats residents often leave sniffles and coughs untreated until they're life threatening, and then they pay for the cost of an emergency room visit.

And in a neighborhood where three of every four people have children, nearly a third of women have never had a gynecological exam, according to the report. Sheinkman said she worries about that, and about the women's access to family planning.

Tamara Sheinkman, director of the Youth Opportunities program, works with school-aged children from Beach Flats. She said she sees a lot of untreated eye and mouth problems.

She said children with respiratory problems, often brought on by the poor ventilation in their apartments,

usually do go to the doctor. But every time they go, they go to a different doctor.

"That is significant," she said. "Because no one monitors their health over time. I became aware of this particularly in working with the children at 204 Riverside (apartment with black mold infestations)."

The addition of a clinic would be another step in turning the neighborhood from a cast-off of the old tourism industry and into a neighborhood in its own right. The neighborhood got a park in the 1980s, and the Beach Flats Community Center has operated out of a portable trailer for years. With the addition of a permanent community center and a child-care center, Reyna Ruiz said the neighborhood is seeming more like its own place instead of an uncomfortable conversion from another use.

"We don't have schools, clinics or churches here," said Ruiz, director of the Beach Flats Community Center. "Something useful, something like this would enhance the neighborhood."

Back in Beach Flats Park, Marquez held her nephews hand and smiled broadly at the prospect of a clinic.

"Oh, *si*," she said in Spanish when asked if she'd get checkups more regularly if there were a clinic in the neighborhood. "Not only me but a lot of other people as well. Not only is it important, but I wouldn't have to take a bus or get a baby-sitter when I needed to go to a doctor."

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## Beach Flats by the numbers

Beach Flats, a triangular neighborhood bordered by Riverside Drive, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and the San Lorenzo River, is home to 1,200 residents. The homes are turn-of-the-century beach bungalows without heat or insulation and that have been converted to year-round living for the mostly Latino inhabitants.

Here's a glimpse of who lives in the neighborhood:

- Average age: 31
- Average household size: 5
- Average years of residency in the neighborhood: 7 years
- Average monthly salary: \$850
- Average number of children: 2
- 59 percent are undocumented immigrants
- 73 percent of residents have children
- 59 percent have no health insurance
- 16 percent have health insurance through their employer.

■ 14 percent relied on Medi-Cal for health insurance.

■ 27 percent of women had never had a gynecological exam.

Most common form of employment:

- Restaurant work (23 percent)
- Other service work (15 percent)
- Blue-collar trades (11 percent)
- Agricultural work (11 percent)
- Unemployed (14 percent)
- Hotel/cleaning work (7 percent)

Reasons residents don't get health care:

- Don't have insurance (39 percent)
- Can't afford the medicine (36 percent)
- Unable to pay (36 percent)
- Have to wait too long (27 percent)
- Lack of transportation (26 percent)
- Doctor doesn't speak my language (22 percent)
- Legal status (21 percent)
- Dislike doctors (18 percent)