

Live Oak's problem: No political clout

By **BOB SMITH**

Is Live Oak becoming the future 'ghetto' of Santa Cruz County?

A bevy of speakers last week seemed to think that the community was being targeted by Santa Cruz County politicians for just that fate.

No one speaking at a meeting of the Live Oak Community Assn. Thursday night at Live Oak School was ready to deny the fact that land prices and county housing policies have combined to create a situation in which 80.5 percent of the low and moderate income housing built in Santa Cruz county from January, 1979, to September, 1982, was located in Live Oak.

"A lot of your problems are built into the growth management system," Bruce Reed, president of the Santa Cruz County Builder's Exchange, told the audience of about 50 people.

A lot more of the area's troubles, Reed theorized, have come about because the area is represented by Dan Forbus, a "minority" member of the Board of Supervisors.

"Dan Forbus has a minority viewpoint," Reed told the group, "your district has the open space, and you're getting the housing.

"You're the whipping boy. You are getting most of the high density," Reed charged.

For a growth management system to survive, Reed told the audience, it needs an assured, steady supply of affordable housing.

"Growth management needs affordable housing, just like a junkie needs dope, to keep it constitutional," Reed added.

The county's permit processing system is geared to keep the system full of affordable housing. "If you come in to the Planning Department with a low income, subsidized project," Reed said, "and boom, you go to the head of the permit processing line."

That has happened time and time again in the Live Oak area, Reed said, with the latest example being the Elizabeth Oaks project, built by Jack Baskin on Capitola Road.

That project qualified for the county's priority processing and moved through the department with bewildering speed.

"You people take it in the shorts," Reed bluntly told the audience.

Live Oak is attractive to a builder trying to meet the county's low income housing demands for two reasons. First, large portions of the community are now zoned for multiple residential, Reed said. That zoning carries a "planned development" (PD) designation on it and frequently, with the right political support, a developer is able to build at densities far greater than would be ordinarily allowed.

Second, Reed said, land costs less in Live Oak. The county, he charged, sets the price for low income housing at below what a builder can construct it for. The result is that a builder seeks the cheapest land possible for the required low income units and, under the transfer of credits system, he can build the market-rate units in Aptos, for example, and the low rent units in Live Oak.

The only way for Live Oak to stop what many of its residents object to, Reed said, is to develop a political power base — one that is capable of either amending Measure J or fighting the liberal majority on the Board of Supervisors.

Forbus told the group he's willing to fight for LOCA's goals, but conceded he can be outgunned on the Board of Supervisors — almost at will.

The case in point is a motel-senior citizens complex planned for 17th Avenue and Portola Drive.

Planning commissioners cut the density of the project after listening to Live Oak residents who were unhappy about it.

The project was appealed to the Board of Supervisors, according to Forbus, by Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton.

"It was appealed by a supervisor who has the votes to put whatever he wants on the land," Forbus told the group, indicating that his hands were tied.

Forbus argued that the senior citizens portion of the complex wasn't a bad thing and tried to make the same argument in favor of the motel complex. But several young mothers in the audience bluntly told him that they were worried about the rapidly increasing traffic along 17th Avenue — traffic that would be increased by the motel. They told Forbus it was only a matter of time until a child walking to one of the three