

# 'Granny units' get cautious approval

SANTA CRUZ — A cautious program allowing 25 "granny units" over the next 13 months was approved unanimously by the City Council Tuesday night.

The intent of the ordinance is to let homeowners with older relatives divide a part of their homes into small apartments for their mothers, mothers-in-law, and other relatives.

The small apartments also can be rented, but only to low-income persons and senior citizens are preferred tenants.

"I think the fears people have about this program have to be taken into account," Councilman Michael Rotkin said. "But, I'm willing to predict it won't destroy any neighborhoods and after a year we can take a look at possibly expanding it."

Councilman Joseph Ghio said he hoped it wouldn't be expanded because "it's so far-out

now, it does threaten neighborhoods."

Presently, the ordinance only allows apartments within existing homes. Apartments can be 500 square feet (600 square feet if found necessary) and houses can be expanded by up to 10 percent of their present size to accommodate the apartment.

They cannot be sold separately. There can be no more than five in each of the city's dozen-or-so census tracts and they must be 500 feet apart on each street so there will be no congestion of granny unit homes.

A city resident said the council should make the ordinance the same as the state bill that ordered cities and counties to address the problem of senior apartments.

The bill, SB 1534 authored by state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, ordered local governments to either come up with a granny-unit

ordinance, determine the city or county didn't need one, or accept Mello's rules governing such units.

In his bill, the small apartments can be detached and free-standing.

The resident said he wants a detached unit "because I don't want my mother-in-law being attached to the house."

Rotkin said the city's ordinance was "a gradual approach" and Ghio pointed out "it's not meant to create a rental unit for just anyone, but for someone in the family."

Applications for the small apartments have to be processed through the city's zoning board and they are permitted in residential zones and some non-residential zones that allow housing.

A parking space must be made available for the unit and the exterior design of the expansion has to blend with the house.