

Supervisors OK 'granny houses'

A tentative step was taken this morning toward allowing the construction of small, low-cost rental units on single-family home lots in Santa Cruz County.

The Board of Supervisors approved "in concept" an experimental program to let a specified number of homeowners build these small units on their lots in addition to the home already on the property.

The board has been casting about for some time for a method that would allow people to build units, called variously "guest houses" or "granny houses", on their property. Included in those units would be kitchen facilities so that the elderly or ill parents or in-laws of the families could live as independently as possible.

Current law restricts the construction on single family lots, in addition to the main house, to a "guest facility" of no more than 600 square feet in size and with no kitchen facilities. The fear has been that to allow kitchen facilities in such units would simply result in the renting out of the units on the open market, thus drastically increasing the density of residential neighborhoods.

But the problem of how to accommodate parents and other family members in this era of high housing costs led to the launching of the "experiment" today. Board Chairman Gary Patton, who made the proposal that was adopted, made it clear that if it became apparent after careful study that the program wasn't working prop-

erly he would be the first to refuse to make it permanent.

As approved this morning, the number of such units during the experimental period would be restricted to no more than 30 units annually and the units would have to be kept in the "affordable" rental category for at least 30 years.

A review of the program will be made by the county's Environmental Coordinator and, after six months, he will report to the county on the actual impact of the program on the county's resources prior to any move to make the program permanent.

Although Midcounty Supervisor Robley Levy expressed some concerns about the impact of such a program in her already densely-populated district, she said because of the real need for accommodations for elderly relatives she was willing to give it a try.

Only Supervisor, Dan Forbus, who represents the Soquel-Live Oak area, opposed it. Forbus said the county law, as it exists, allows families to add on to their homes, or build a guest house, for their elderly relatives, absent only kitchen facilities. He said that since state law constrains the board from limiting facilities to relatives, the proposed law was "just a left-handed way of doubling the density. What we're doing is putting another house on a single-family lot."