

Housing

# Affordable housing plan falling short in Watsonville

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WATSONVILLE — The city's affordable housing ordinance has fallen far short of its goals, in part because of an overall slump in the housing market and in part because of a lack of developable land, according to a report to the City Council Tuesday.

Since its inception in 1991, the ordinance has directly resulted in only four homes constructed by private developers and 149 built or permitted by non-profit groups. A 1991 housing report indicated that the city was 2,600 units short of the need at that time.

"If you look at it overall, it's pitiful, for so many years and just this number of units done," said Councilman Oscar Rios. "We have a good ordinance, but if it doesn't come into use and no projects come forward, what good is it?"

Assistant city planner Mary Alsip said developers have been reluctant to build on the remaining tracts within the city limits, which are either too small or would cost too much to install required infrastructure.

"We've had developer after developer look at the infrastructure requirements to develop these parcels, and once they see what's required, they go elsewhere," she said.

The city's general plan calls for 300 market-rate and affordable-rate homes per year to meet the city's housing needs.

"This year only 34 have been built; it's ridiculous," said Councilman Lowell Hurst. "We're nowhere near meeting the goals of the general plan."

Under the ordinance, developers

must set aside 25 percent of their units as affordable. For projects of less than eight units, and for commercial and industrial projects, they may contribute \$2.80 per square foot of construction, instead.

The city has collected \$356,901 in in-lieu fees for affordable housing since 1991.

The council also heard some startling statistics from Lisa Lampmann, program coordinator of the city's Enterprise Community. In a survey of 103 youth who use the city's Sports Facility, Youth Center and Ramsay Park facility, a higher percentage of the girls reported gang involvement and lack of school attendance than the boys.

Twenty-nine percent of the girls said they were "hanging out" with gangs, as compared with 22 percent of the boys; 29 percent said they were not in school, as compared with 25 percent of the boys.

Alexandra Elite, youth case manager for the Enterprise Zone, recommended that the city implement more co-educational programs and do more outreach targeting girls in the community who are not yet using the recreational facilities.

Capt. Mickey Aluffi of the Watsonville Police Department reported on the progress of the city's violence reduction efforts, passed by the city council last October as a part of the Week Without Violence:

● The Youth Job Opportunity to Work program began on March 3, with 10 young people referred from the Si Se Puede drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. All 10 youths are working with the city's Public Works Department on a six-month program, after which the city will try to place them with private employers.

● Four part-time counselors have been hired by Fenix services and are working with youths at local recreation centers, targeting those who are involved with gangs and drug and alcohol abuse.

● Fenix Services has received a grant to fund a Saturday School, which will be held at the

Watsonville Police Department as an educational program to deter gang and other delinquent activity.

● The curfew center has been in operation since Feb. 21 and has processed about 5-7 young people per weekend. The youths are provided with counseling and other activities.

● Four police officers have been assigned to the Direct Action Response Team and are being trained in gang investigation, surveillance techniques and drug enforcement.

The council also approved a plan for the new Burger King restaurant to be built at the corner of Riverside Drive and Main Street. Dubbed "the Cadillac of fast-food establishments" by one council

member, the elaborate, Spanish-style facility will feature two patios, abundant landscaping and a "Welcome to Watsonville" sign.

The restaurant is to be located in a high-crime area targeted for redevelopment with the hope that increased traffic and lighting in the area will cut down on gang and other criminal activity.

But Councilman Rios said he had heard concerns from gang counselors and area residents that the restaurant might be claimed by local gangs.

Police Chief Terry Medina said there are numerous businesses that are in one territory or another, and they have not been claimed as gang territory.