

✓ Homeless Find a Home

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William James to run shelter on Cedar Street

The Santa Cruz County legal department has found a way around city zoning requirements, clearing the way for the opening of a temporary emergency downtown shelter for the homeless. The shelter will be run by the William James Foundation (WJF), headed by Paul Lee and Page Smith, and will be located at 320C Cedar Street, the former home of Family Sauna Shop.

WJF approached the city and county last week with an offer to operate and fund a 25-bed shelter, if a facility could be provided. WJF suggested using either the Loudon Nelson Community Center or the county's Emeline Street social services facility. The Supes asked staff to look into both locations and was told this week that while the Emeline Street facility could work, the Cedar Street Location would be far better. County Human Services Director Susan Mauriello pointed out that while use of the Emeline Street buildings would require displacement of several evening meetings, structural changes and the use of portable toilets, Cedar Street

is ready to go and even has showers.

The problem seemed to be, however, that while the city would have to approve any use of the Cedar Street site, Emeline, as a county facility, could have been used without such approval. Getting city permission could have delayed the project into January, a prospect that upset shelter proponents. They accused the county of passing the buck and some even talked about moving into the Cedar Street building without permission.

However, County Administrative Officer George Newell found a way around the city permit requirement. The county rushed to sign a lease with the Cedar Street property owner, declaring the site a temporary county facility and exempting it from city zoning jurisdiction. The county plans to operate the shelter only until the end of January when it hopes to have established more permanent housing for many of the area's homeless. According to Mauriello, the county is looking at establishing several small shelters in "homelike" settings. ■