

Shelter for homeless gets cautious approval

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By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Peter Carota's vision of treating the street people "in a dignified manner, as if they are Jesus," moved a step closer to reality Thursday.

After a lively three-hour public hearing attended by 120 people — some of them reading from scripture — Zoning Board members gave cautious approval to Carota's proposal for an emergency shelter for the homeless at the site of a candle factory at Golf Club Drive and River Street on the northern edge of the city.

Shelter opponents said they would appeal the decision to the City Council. They claim board members did not follow normal procedure in making the decision. They say the board

members' findings were unclear and rooted in social experimentation, not land-use regulations.

Board members and some opponents praised Carota's charity work, but tied their approval to a six-month probation period, installation of fire sprinklers, minimum occupancy standards to follow state emergency-shelter guidelines, more detailed designs, and rules of operation to be approved before the opening of the shelter.

Board chairman Jeff Oberdorfer dissented.

Oberdorfer said it was important the shelter be religiously non-denominational and "not folks forcing their beliefs on others."

Carota is the organizer of the Catholic St. Francis Soup Kitchen on Mora Street, where he daily feeds the homeless and others.

The bearded Carota, a former Realtor, appeared at the hearing in bare feet and wearing a dark blue sweatshirt, wooden cross around his neck and his usual wide-eyed, broad grin.

Shelter opponents included a new coalition called North River Street Neighbors and Paradise Park residents.

Although there are only a few houses near the shelter site, residents said the shelter's impact would radiate into a much larger area and serve as a magnet for homeless people in other cities to come to Santa Cruz.

Opponents said the shelter would aggravate — not solve — existing problems, such as fires from illegal camping, garbage, litter, over-

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dent Lynne Thompson, currently update files papers by next week

Shelter OK'd

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crowding, burglaries, public urination and defecation, noise and traffic congestion.

Shelter opponent Susan Stade said, "I don't believe Jesus urinated in public, panhandled, lived off public assistance with food stamps, started illegal camp fires, littered ..."

Carota, project director Norma Claunch — a former Dominican Hospital nursing director — and a group of volunteers plan to house up to 50 men, women and children in sexually segregated dormitories. A rule of silence is to be observed on most parts of the property. Carota said he did not know whether or not television would be permitted.

Shelter doors would open at 5 p.m. No one would be allowed in after 8 p.m.

Breakfast would be served —

probably something like cold cereal and instant oatmeal, according to Carota — before doors would close again at 9 a.m. Residents could have lunch at the Soup Kitchen, located about one mile from the shelter near the railroad tracks — a travel route for the city's 200 to 300 street people.

Members of North River Street Neighbors carried black and yellow signs, proclaiming "No mass shelters."

Shelter opponents objected to Bible readings by shelter supporters during the hearing.

"I thought church and state were supposed to be separated. I object to a church service. This is supposed to be a Zoning Board meeting," shouted one opponent from the audience floor.

"People can express their opinion," replied Oberdorfer.

Later in the hearing, opponents chattered during testimony from a shelter supporter who introduced himself by saying, "This child's name is John."

The rumblings in the audience were triggered by his remark that there was once a time when Santa Cruz was noted as "a spiritual center of the world."

One shelter supporter, Barbara Ryan, apologized for the smell of urine on her clothes.

"I've been bathing in the river and in public restrooms, but I didn't have a chance to wash the urine off ... but I'm not a dog," she told the audience. Ryan described herself as a former alcoholic and drug abuser who had been "forced to go into the streets. Here in Santa Cruz, I discovered what brotherly love is."