

Shelter for homeless opens Sunday

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The long-awaited River Street shelter for the homeless is set to open Sunday.

The city of Santa Cruz has been overseeing the renovation of the building on River Street near Highway 1, and expects to complete the first phase tomorrow.

The staff of the Shelter Project will spend all day Saturday moving in furniture and getting the shelter ready for its first guests on Sunday, said Paul Brindel, executive direc-

tor of the Shelter Project. The Shelter Project, an affiliate of Democratic Management Services, will manage the new shelter under a contract with the city.

Because the shelter has only two bathrooms, it can't accommodate more than 16 people at first, said Assistant City Manager Laura Brown. Ten of those slots will be reserved for homeless people identified as having mental problems, and two will be for the shelter managers.

Renovation on the shelter is being done in three phases. The first goal was to get the main

building ready for occupancy, and that will be done by tomorrow. Then the city will turn its attention to the garage, which is to be fixed up so that 10 people can sleep there.

In the third phase, after the winter weather subsides, the homeless will use only the garage, while further work is done on the main building, adding a kitchen and more bathrooms.

"Shelter is always about plumbing," Brindel said. "That's the bottom line.

"If you've got plumbing, you

can live out of a tent. Plumbing is the serious issue."

Once all three phases of the work are completed, the shelter will house up to 30 people a night. The residents will be able to stay 30 days, with possible 30-day extensions, Brindel said. The goal is to find permanent housing by the end of the first month.

Shelter Project staff and staff from the county's Mental Health Department will work with the shelter residents in helping them find other places to live and in offering counseling, Brindel said. There will even be an office at the shelter where mental health workers can meet with the residents.

Even as the Shelter Project is starting up this new shelter, it plans to offer again the "satellite" shelter program, in which two or three churches take in homeless people each night. The churches are able to serve between 20 and 40 people, Brindel said.

A formal open house will be held at the new shelter Nov. 13 from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. to show it off to the public.