

EARTHQUAKE '89- Santa Cruz
County

✓County waiting on aid requests

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SANTA CRUZ — The county had many of its wishes granted this weekend as the state Legislature passed a package of earthquake relief bills, but it also got a wait-and-see answer on several major requests, county leaders say.

Senator Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, said they will continue to work for more aid when the Legislature reconvenes in January.

Following the conclusion Saturday night of the Legislature's special session on earthquake relief, supervisors Chairman Gary Patton released a list of county needs that did not make the Legislature's "A list" last week.

Patton said the county still needs state aid in five areas: geologic study, sales tax, redevelopment, alleviation of hazards, and easing of time limits.

The county still needs money for detailed geologic studies, especially for some of the mountain neighborhoods where scientists suspect giant landslides may threaten hundreds of homes.

Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy said the studies must be done soon, before the rainy season, so that building inspectors can decide whether it is safe to allow residents to return to their homes. The county will probably pay for the studies and hope for reimbursement, she said.

San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley said the county will have to lobby hard for another request — that the state pay the county back for lost sales-tax revenues. The county expects to lose a lot of money because so many businesses have been damaged and closed.

But Keeley said legislators want to see proof of the losses before they agree to anything. "This is a tough one that will take a lot of

work to document and get support," he said.

The county wants the Legislature to subsidize redevelopment districts, which are expected to suffer when property values drop from damage. Redevelopment districts make their money by being allowed to skim off money from property-tax growth after a "base year."

Senator Mello said he is considering a bill that would let redevelopment districts set the base year earlier, and the state would give the districts the money they would have made off taxes from that year forward.

Senator Mello said he is intending to push hard in January for that bill, because otherwise the districts may be "in danger of defaulting" on repayment of bonds because the "bottom has fallen out" of their source of income.

Patton said the county also needs a bill which would allow disaster-crippled local governments extra time to pay off bonds, and meet other such financial time limits.

Finally, Patton said the county hopes legislators will pass a bill that would make the state pay for "hazard mitigation." Supervisors said that the hazards they have in mind are things like landslides threatening to dump on state highways and county roads, or land slumps threatening to drop out from under buildings and roads.

Mello said he plans to introduce at least two other bills not on the county's wish list. He said he'll seek money for new construction of seismically sound buildings to replace the unsound buildings which were destroyed in the earthquake — such as on Santa Cruz's Pacific Garden Mall.

Finally, he said he hopes to find money to replace the lost property taxes for local governments. Counties need "to be made whole." By January, he said, he hopes he'll have some "hard figures" on the losses.