

Mello calls for tough building laws

By LANE WALLACE
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Tough construction standards are needed as Watsonville and other earthquake-damaged areas rebuild from the Oct. 17 earthquake, State Sen. Henry Mello told a state commission this morning.

"The cities have not been aggressive enough in code enforcement," Mello, D-Watsonville, told a meeting of the State Seismic Safety Commission at Watsonville City Hall.

"We have to look at new standards," said Mello, who is urging that older buildings be "retrofitted" with more safety measures when they're rebuilt. Newer buildings, Mello said, were generally able to withstand the shock of the quake.

"We are committed to rebuilding our communities," said Mello, who is sponsoring several earthquake-relief bills in the legislature.

Homeless still waiting for those mobile homes

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Construction crews are continuing to work 12 hours a day on building a temporary mobile-home park for earthquake homeless in Watsonville.

But county housing task force chairman Luther Perry said there is still no date for moving the first of 50 mobile homes onto the site behind the Freedom Boulevard courthouse annex.

Perry said this morning that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is continuing to ship mobile homes from Texas to Fort Ord, where they are being refurbished and held until permanent sites are readied.

Those mobile homes are now earmarked for Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties, Perry said.

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Mello was one in a parade of community leaders who addressed the 11-member commission during a three-hour hearing. The commission took no action today, but will consider the comments made in Watsonville in

formulating recommendations to the governor and Legislature.

Charlene Shaffer, executive director of the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce, said the state

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Current estimates forecast the need for between 350 and 400 mobile homes in Santa Cruz County to house the earthquake homeless. But most of the mobile homes will probably wind up in the Pajaro Valley, Perry said.

The county's housing task force originally proposed mobile-home parks at three Mid- and North county locations — the O'Neill Ranch in Soquel, the old Skypark airport in Scotts Valley and UC-Santa Cruz.

Those sites probably will not be needed if efforts are successful to find other housing for displaced people — particularly the 200 or so seniors who lived in three Santa Cruz residential hotels closed by the quake.

Perry said negotiations are still continuing with FEMA and state officials over a list of 10 conditions the county has imposed for using the county-

owned property behind the Freedom Boulevard courthouse annex.

Perry said FEMA officials are objecting any conditions on the use of the property.

Sticking points, Perry said, are:

- A 6-foot fence around the property. FEMA says they have no authority in their regulations to build such a fence. Local governments say they can't afford to build it.

- A laundry room for park residents. FEMA doesn't want to build a communal laundry room but will install washers and dryers — on an individual basis — in each mobile home, if requested.

- Park management. The county wants a live-in manager on the site 24 hours a day, seven days a week. FEMA, Perry said, wants to have people on the site only during the day.

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needs to look at the "economic aftershocks" of the earthquake to the business community.

Some of the downtown businesses damaged by the quake have reopened, but it's not business as before, Shaffer said.

"There's a perception of not wanting to come downtown," she said.

John Fry, a Watsonville developer, said buildings should be strong enough to protect the occupants during a disaster, but requiring the "perfect building" would be cost-prohibitive.

"Our main goal is to protect safety. It doesn't mean protecting the investment," responded Lloyd Cluff, the commission's chairman.

Luis De La Cruz, chairman of the Hispanic Affairs Committee of the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce, said people who deal with earthquake victims need to understand the emotional trauma those people are going through.

The people, De La Cruz said,