

SC City Council stiffens codes

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council approved two emergency ordinances Tuesday night that establish standards for rebuilding earthquake-damaged buildings and require replacement housing when single-room occupancy hotels are demolished.

The new building codes are effective immediately and cover all damaged buildings. The codes are designed to bring the buildings close to current building standards.

A future ordinance will cover undamaged unreinforced masonry buildings, Chief Building Official Dick Stubendorff said. The new codes are not designed to make buildings "earthquake safe," Stubendorff said. But they will ensure people will be able to get out safely.

The ordinance approved Tuesday night also establishes a new city commission, a five-member appeals board to hear challenges of specific enforcement decisions.

"We don't need a new board," commented Councilman Joe Ghio.

"Yes we do," said Planning Director Peter Katzlberger.

The board would consist of building professionals who would rule on appeals of Stubendorff's decisions.

"The public has to have recourse," Stubendorff said. He said he's had "good response" from people interested in serving on the board.

On the subject of single-room occupancy hotels, the council unanimously approved an ordinance requiring that any owner seeking to demolish or convert a hotel provide

Please see CODES — A12

Codes/ Safety said top concern

Continued from Page A1

half as many rooms in another project.

The city already requires that 50 percent replacement housing be built when previous housing is lost. In the high-density beach area the requirement is 100 percent replacement.

Since the earthquake, approximately 400 rooms in single-room occupancy hotels have been lost with the demolition of the Casa del Rey and Colonial Hotels, and the abandonment of the Palomar Inn and St. George Hotel.

The manager of the Palomar has said the owners intend to repair the hotel.

Barry Swenson, owner of the St. George, said he intends to demolish his hotel.

Planning director Katzlberger said it is not clear whether the replacement ordinance would pertain to the St. George because it is currently an empty hotel that the city ordered vacated.

Swenson has applied for a demolition permit, Katzlberger said.

There was no opposition to the ordinance. Representatives for the mentally ill and low-income hotel residents spoke in its favor.

Gary McNeil, an attorney with Legal Aid, urged the council to require more than 50 percent replacement housing. "Fifty percent won't provide for the needs" of St. George Hotel residents, McNeil said.

Legal Aid's Housing Law Center was on the street level of the hotel. Most of the hotel's residents had low incomes, McNeil said.