

HOMELESS

Extension request for emergency shelter

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SANTA CRUZ — With the William James Association's emergency shelter on Cedar Street due to close in less than a week, County Administrative Officer George Newell has recommended that the Board of Supervisors extend the shelter's lease on life to March 20.

Newell's recommendation comes in the face of a vow by Santa Cruz City Council members to see that the 25-bed facility at 320-C Cedar St. closes by Feb. 1.

In a memo to supervisors last week, the CAO recommended that the board appropriate just under \$10,000 for the emergency shelter — \$4,694 to cover the rental costs of the Cedar Street facility from last Dec. 18 through March 20, and \$5,300 for unspecified "professional and special services," and "special departmental expenses."

Health and Human Resources Agency officials said the additional funds were needed for such items as

insurance, garbage pickup and utilities.

Newell's funding request marks the first time supervisors have actually been asked to appropriate money for the emergency shelter.

When the William James Association first offered in December to operate a shelter if the county and city would find a place to house one, City Council members pledged to contribute up to \$5,000 for the project.

At that time, council members assumed that the shelter would be in the county's Health and Human Resources Agency Auditorium on Emeline Street. But supervisors rejected that location in favor of the Cedar Street site. When city officials

said a shelter could not be opened there without lengthy use-permit hearings, Newell circumvented city procedures by arranging for the county to lease the Cedar Street space.

Angry council members then said no city money would be appropriated for the emergency shelter, and none has been to date.

Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt also said she would seek assurances that the shelter in the middle of the downtown business district would be closed no later than Feb. 1. Other members of the council said they, too, did not want to see the shelter remain open past that date.

In his memo to supervisors, Newell said the Cedar Street shelter had

been "operating smoothly."

According to Susan A. Mauriello, Human Resources Agency Administrator, the shelter has been fully occupied since its opening, "even though there have been sporadic vacancies at ... other shelters."

Since Jan. 8, county vans have been picking up shelter "guests" in the morning and shuttling them from the Cedar Street site to the St. Francis Catholic Kitchen, where Food and Nutrition Services has been providing them with breakfast. "Interested persons" have been bused from there to the state Employment Development Department, the Social Security office, the Veterans Service office and to the county's Emeline Street facility for job

counseling and other services.

Newell's recommendation to the board to keep the Cedar Street facility going came as the William James Association and the Saint Francis Shelter urged the county and city to take immediate steps to see that the homeless who have sought nightly refuge there would not be thrown into the streets again.

In a joint letter to the Board of Supervisors and the council, Saint Francis Shelter operators and the non-profit Association also proposed that the number of beds for homeless single males here be expanded to 80 or more.

And, taking note of complaints by merchants that homeless people milling about the Pacific Garden

Mall are driving customers away, they suggested that the Downtown Merchants Association and the Chamber of Commerce "respond positively to the situation by establishing a daytime recreation center open to the homeless."

Their recommendations were forwarded to supervisors and the council late last week.

Supervisors will consider Newell's recommendation to keep the Cedar Street shelter going when they meet Tuesday morning. The matter was sent to them as a routine "consent" item. Consent matters are normally voted on without discussion, unless board members request that they be placed on the board's regular agenda.