

County officials back 'prevailing wage' rule

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Santa Cruz County's Redevelopment Agency is recommending that the county Board of Supervisors adopt a "prevailing wage" policy for large government-funded redevelopment projects in the county.

The recommendation, which opponents of the policy were expecting, will be considered by supervisors tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. at the County Governmental Center in Santa Cruz.

The issue of paying construction workers a prevailing wage has sparked sharp debates in the county in the last two months. Proponents say it is a way of mak-

ing sure workers on government projects get a fair share of the money; opponents say it will force wages up and is an unfair intrusion into private business.

Opponents say the method of determining the prevailing wage means that it will almost always be the union wage, and a report by the Redevelopment Agency staff confirms that argument.

Under state rules, the prevailing wage is the wage paid to the most workers in a particular area. For instance, in a sampling of 10 carpenters, if eight of them make different wages between \$15 and \$25 an hour and two are union at \$27 an hour, the prevailing wage is \$27.

Union carpenters make about \$27 an hour, including benefits. Tom Hopkins, a construction company owner in Santa Cruz and a vocal foe of the prevailing wage law, said the "market-driven" wage for non-union carpenters is

about \$4.50 an hour less than union wages.

If adopted, the prevailing wage law would be imposed on any redevelopment project that receives \$100,000 or more in government funds.