

# Beach Flats 'city hall' proposed

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SANTA CRUZ — An experimental mini-City Hall — where youngsters could join after-school sports programs and residents could complain about traffic — may be coming to Beach Flats.

The City Council is considering a proposal to set up a satellite center in the heart of the low-income neighborhood, giving residents better access to city services and police.

"We want to bring City Hall closer to the neighborhood and also give neighbors a place that they can use," said Dannettee Shoemaker, recreation superintendent for the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Beach Flats residents don't have a school, church or any public building in their neighborhood. If they want to hold a meeting, they have to gather outdoors in a tiny public park.

A center could offer a space for community groups to meet, Shoemaker said.

The City Council approved a tentative plan Tuesday to use a temporary building based at Beach Flats Park until a permanent location can be found.

How the center will be funded and who will oversee it is undecided.

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More details are scheduled to come before the council in mid-July. If approved, the center could be running by the end of September.

Shoemaker said neighbors will be asked to choose which city programs will be based there.

One that is definite is the Kids Klub after-school recreation program already operating in Beach Flats. Other possibilities are drug and alcohol abuse programs, school clubs and gang prevention groups.

"We want to provide programs, especially for the kids, who don't have the benefits of other neighborhoods," said Shoemaker. "They don't have the advantage of being able to hang out after school."

City police, who have stepped up patrols in Beach Flats in recent months, also will operate from the center. Joining them will be city inspectors who have been focusing on improving substandard housing in the neighborhood.

Longtime Beach Flats resident Lola Padilla said the mini-City Hall sounds like a good idea, but added that whoever runs it must be able to communicate with the neighbor-

hood.

"It depends on who's in there to talk to," she said. "If they (residents) have the confidence to go in there with small problems, something basic, then they can go for it."

The satellite facility is modeled on a program in San Jose, where several centers have been set up in neighborhoods troubled by drugs and gangs.

Santa Cruz officials were given a tour of that program two weeks ago.

"It gives (neighbors) access to decision-makers and access to services, and they impress on people they can see a change in their neighborhood," said Vice Mayor Scott Kennedy. "It's partly designed to convince people something can happen."

Kennedy has been fighting an ongoing battle against the perception that city has made no improvements in Beach Flats.

He sees the satellite facility as the latest in a series of attempts by the city to improve the neighborhood.

Deputy Chief Steve Belcher said

the Police Department has spent 10,000 hours in Beach Flats in the past six months. As a result, he said, drug dealing has been "dramatically reduced," but support programs are needed to back up those gains.

Kennedy cites other projects that have provided summer jobs for neighborhood youths, and improved street lights, sewers and storm drains.

Also under consideration is a plan to block off some Beach Flats streets to through traffic to help choke drug trafficking. The Beach Flats Specific Plan, which addresses a number of neighborhood improvement issues, will be considered by the council this summer.

Timing the satellite center with the implementation of these projects gives "kind of a turning-the-corner feeling to this," said Kennedy.

"This kind of (satellite) program is the real key to all the other kinds of issues we're looking at in Beach Flats," said Councilman Mike Rotkin. "It doesn't work unless you have the positive side to go with it."