

A new future for mobile homes

Banning mobile homes from areas zoned for single-family residences will soon be against the law.

On July 1, a new state law takes effect that will force localities to allow mobile homes that have been placed on foundations into R-1 (single-family residential) districts. Most cities, Watsonville among them, now limit mobile homes to mobile home parks.

Once the mobile homes are placed on foundations, they will be treated like ordinary homes, according to city Planning Director Bob Ellenwood. Because the city will have control over architectural features, Ellenwood said, the factory-manufactured homes will tend to look like regular tract homes.

The bill, SB 1960, is aimed at providing more affordable housing in the state. Because the homes are built in factories rather than on-site, construction costs are lower.

The Planning Department has written an ordinance that will help the city meet the requirements of SB 1960. Ellenwood said that the ordinance permits "eligible" mobile homes to be installed in any R-1 zone within the city, but allows the City Council to designate specific areas in

which they would be allowed. This would be done through amendments to the city's zoning ordinance.

The City Council is expected to discuss the ordinance at its meeting tonight.

The ordinance, Ellenwood said this morning, tries to ensure that the mobile homes will be "compatible" with neighborhoods.

For example, the ordinance requires that the exterior of the mobile homes be of a material "customarily used on conventional dwellings." Thus, a mobile home with an aluminum facade would not be permitted in an area of wooden Victorian homes.

Ellenwood said that he can think of some R-1 areas in the city where the manufactured homes would actually improve the appearance of the areas. A map outlining those areas will be presented to the council tonight, he said.

If the mobile homes are part of a subdivision, they will have to be approved by the city's Design Review Commission. Individual homes on individual lots, however, will not have to be OK'd by the commission, Ellenwood said.

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