

City Council approves shelter for homeless

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The City Council Tuesday approved a permit for a homeless shelter on a 1.4-acre parcel owned by the University of California in an industrial district at Highway 1 and River Street.

But, two council members commented afterwards they don't know when, or if, the city will succeed in buying the property — valued at \$580,000 — from university Regents.

Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt and Mayor Jane Weed said the city would be making a new, counteroffer to the university in coming days different from the \$550,000 offer reported by city officials about two weeks ago.

They did not know if the university would accept the counterproposal or when a decision would be reached.

"We will definitely go back and try to improve our offer," said Wormhoudt, a leader in the city's bid to acquire the property and the house on it for a 30-bed shelter. She made the statement after council members held a closed litigation session Tuesday to discuss the property purchase. Details of the counteroffer were not disclosed.

Wormhoudt did say the university had rejected the city's last offer after receiving a better, informal proposal from an unnamed individual or group.

She and Weed agreed there is increasing, political pressure on university officials to offer the property for sale on the open market.

As expected, council members upheld an October Zoning Board decision approving a permit for the proposed shelter. Joe Ghio cast the only dissenting vote. Katy Sears-Williams was absent.

They denied an appeal filed to the board decision by shelter opponent, Rick Santee, a former zoning board member and a businessman in the neighborhood of the shelter site. Santee has said he and others have an interest in buying the property.

Although only one other person supported Santee appeal at a public hearing on the permit, Santee said the neighborhood was totally against

the shelter. He submitted petitions with 46 signatures in opposition to the shelter as incompatible with the neighborhood. Opponents maintained their neighborhood was being "unfairly singled out to be the brunt of the homeless problem" since there is already a 25-bed shelter within a few blocks of the site.

Thirty persons attended the hearing, 10 of whom spoke for the shelter.

Santee told council members their "minds are already made up" on the permit.

"The reason you don't see other neighbors here protesting is that we feel it is impossible to receive an impartial hearing from you, as the applicant for the project.

"I am merely here in the spirit of exhausting administrative remedies," said Santee, thus paving the way for a future lawsuit.

Santee agreed "the need for a shelter exists and is real but the perceived need is irrelevant to land-use issues."

He maintained the sales prices of more than \$500,000 was "ridiculous" for a 30-bed shelter.

"You've selected perhaps the most expensive land in the city." He said environmental issues had not been addressed and zoning board procedures were breached.

After giving his testimony, Santee left the hearing early before council members made the decision.

One shelter supporter who gave testimony at the hearing, Arlyn Leiseira of Live Oak, likened Santee to a "modern-day scrooge."

But Ghio said Santee was merely exercising his rights as a citizen in filing the appeal. Ghio and Arnold Levine chided council members and the public for making "personal attacks" on Santee at the hearing.

"If I were him, I would have left early too," said Ghio.

But Michael Rotkin said they weren't attacks. "Nobody called him any personal names I heard. They said he had fears that were unfounded."

City Attorney Rod Atchison assured council members they would be on sound legal ground in approving the permit.

Santee maintains the state public-housing law requires a shelter project of this type to be submitted to the vote of the people. Atchison said that law applies to low-cost housing projects, not shelters.

While the project is pending, an interim, city-county shelter has been opened until March 1 in Beach Flats at the Peter Pan Motel at a cost of up to \$20,000 to the city.

The seven-day shelter would be open from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m. Clients would have to leave the premises at other times, except in special cases.

The shelter operator would develop a program to give shelter to "overflow" clients.

Federal eligibility codes would outlaw the use of food stamps by shelter clients.

Rule violators would be requested to leave. Continued violations would result in intervention by police, according to the operations plan.

Services would be provided at the shelter by county staff during daytime hours on weekdays for clients with "health-related disabilities."

"Individual development plans" — or IDP's in the jargon of shelter promoters — would be drafted in consultations between clients and staff. Clients would be expected to find jobs and permanent housing, except in special cases.

The institution would require "progress reports" to be placed in individual's files. Meetings and workshops would be held on such topics as "tenant education," home budgeting, alcohol and drug abuse, stress reduction, veterans' outreach, health and jobs.

Breakfast and dinner would be provided, using food donations and public subsidies to reduce costs. Bag lunches would be prepared at the shelter for job-seeking clients.

Clients considered capable of working would be expected to look for work during the daytime, six days a week, according to shelter rules approved by county supervisors and councilmembers. The shelter would be operated by the Shelter Project, an affiliate of the non-profit agency, Democratic Management Services.