

County weighs living wage

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SANTA CRUZ — County officials are considering raising the wages of hundreds of low-income workers to ease the effects of the area's soaring cost of living.

The move by the county Board of Supervisors comes two months after Santa Cruz city leaders adopted a living-wage ordinance establishing \$11 and \$12 hourly minimums for some city and contract workers.

"We are clearly in a period where it is becoming harder and harder for people to live and work in Santa Cruz County, even when they have relatively good jobs," Supervisor Mardi

Wormhoudt said. "The cost of housing is extraordinary, and people are getting priced out of the community."

According to a report released last year by the

California Association of Realtors, the minimum income needed to buy a median-priced house in the county is \$117,000.

Local business leaders were skeptical of the plan.

"Their motivation is more social engineering rather than truly looking at the big picture," said Michael Schmidt, chief executive officer of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce. "But we aren't surprised by this. This is the Socialist Republic of Santa Cruz."

Wormhoudt and Supervisor Jeff Almquist Tuesday will ask for an economic analysis of a possible living-wage ordinance using the city's guidelines. The information would then be considered in June when the board prepares its budget.

"In concept, I would certainly support it," Wormhoudt said. "But it is not prudent to advocate until the economic impacts are well understood. My guess is you will see a very long discussion of this in June."

Please see **LIVING WAGE** on **BACK PAGE**

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