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Funds OK'd for study of streetpeople

Homeless to 1989
By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council Tuesday agreed to spend up to \$5,000 to put the streetpeople of San Lorenzo Park under a sociological magnifying glass.

The council voted to participate with a team of UC Santa Cruz researchers to detail the size and nature of the streetpeople population and the public's perception of it.

The study won't be the first time San Lorenzo Park inhabitants have been put under the scrutiny of researchers.

In 1970, the county Board of Supervisors ordered a \$500 study on the "undesirable transient element," otherwise known as the "UTE" study. The UTE study was an attempt to define the nature of the hippie population that came to the parks of Santa Cruz during the height of the Flower Children movement.

The results of the UTE study were the appointment of a committee by supervisors and the brief popularization of "UTE" T-shirts.

In coming to grips with defining exactly what a "UTE" was, the consultant hired by supervisors — Environmental Operations Research Company of Los Gatos — had drawn up a list of "undesirable" persons, including thieves, murderers, university students, commune builders, welfare recipients, the homeless and long-haired people.

The study concluded there were UTE-related problems with drug and welfare programs abuse, but that a more costly study was needed (\$45,000-60,000) to detail the magnitude of the problems and to provide solutions.

The consultant finally defined a "UTE" as "the objectionable part of a larger population" in the under-30 age bracket, who are characterized by long hair, "highly informal" dress and anti-establishment opinions.

The UTE study was the butt of many jokes.

The research team for the new study, dubbed the Santa Cruz Area Study, will include two streetpeople, called "native

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Streetpeople study

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investigators," who will be paid \$800 to help with the research.

The head of the research team will be UCSC community studies and sociology professor William Friedland.

Friedland said the dean of social sciences has committed \$6,000 to the project. The original estimated cost was \$10,000.

Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams opposed spending any money for the study. "Generally, when things get studied nothing gets done," she said.

The proposed study refers to the streetpeople as "downtown transients," maintaining this terms is preferable to other words used to describe streetpeople, such as "trolls."

But Sears-Williams said the "focus is off. A lot of the transients are at least as permanent as other residents."

Sears-Williams said "there seems to be a stigma attached to those who oppose transients," but, she said, "virtually all animals in a society shun a group who (threatens) the society."

"I don't think there's anything wrong with people being angry with those people who are abusing society."

Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt said the streetpeople problem is not the city's "foremost problem," but "it is a problem."

"I know people tell me a lot of things about that population that I have no way of verifying." The study proposes to focus on the streetpeople in their own "domain" to develop data on the streetpeople "economy," such as dependence on soup kitchens and social services.

The proposal calls for interviews with downtown merchants, employees and residents who come into frequent contact with the streetpeople. There will be a telephone survey to probe public perceptions of the downtown problem.

Results will be analyzed by the study's director, Ph.D. candidate in sociology, Robert Marotto, and by a faculty commit-

tee, including sociology professors Robert Alford and John Kitsuse, assistant psychology professor Valerie Simmons, and philosophy and legal studies professor Richard Wasserstrom.

The study will "contribute to an informed public discussion" about streetpeople and provide an information base on which policy decisions can be made by the council, according to the study proposal.

Friedland said the study is an opportunity for university research skills to be applied to community issues.

The Council decided to include the city's Downtown Commission in participating on the study.

Wormhoudt said the involvement of the Downtown Commission would help to ensure "we're using the city money to get something the city really needs."

Mayor John Laird said he is getting the message from residents that "we're doing nothing."

"It seems to me we're doing alot," said Laird. "If we're not doing something we should be doing, I want to hear what it is."

Laird said he doesn't think the city should build a shelter for the streetpeople, but he believes the city is obligated to avert violence due to tensions between the streetpeople and merchants or other residents. "We do have a rising tide of violence around this issue in the city."

Laird cited actions the council has taken to relieve the streetpeople problem, including adding more police patrols to the park and Mall, encouraging the use of San Lorenzo Park by a greater cross-section of the community by scheduling soccer games and concerts, starting a park ranger program, establishing closing hours for parks, putting parking meters alongside the park to discourage longterm parking of vans and campers, and revising the municipal code to ensure the laws on the books are up to date and enforceable.