

'Daniel Boone's' last chance

Recent developments at the state capital may spell the end of rural tranquility for county residents who choose to live in homes built to their own specifications.

While the state Housing and Community Development Commission (HCD) has moved to create regulations which would fit the needs of more than 100,000 rural California households, another state agency recently succeeded in stalling implementation of the new codes.

The state Building Standards Commission (BSC), which is composed primarily of building industry representatives, voted September 28 to ignore the HCD prepared Alternative Building Standards for limited density,

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owner-built homes until a specially appointed advisory council and the state Attorney General have reviewed them.

"This vote will perpetuate for at least the next four or five months a condition of complete anarchy," an HCD commissioner threatened at the hearing.

In Mendocino County, the people who choose to live like Daniel Boone have already posted signs warning officials that if they try to enforce standard building codes they will run the risk of being shot.

At Last Chance, near Davenport in Santa Cruz County, however, residents have done their best to remain cool since nearly one year ago when sheriff's deputies raided their community and arrested several people for building code violations.

At issue is whether a rural home built by the person who plans to live in it can be exempted from regulations which seem only to apply to houses being built for sale in urban areas.

Many of the people who live at Last Chance were once city dwellers who have since decided to drop out of mainstream society to pursue a slower-paced life.

But in building their own worlds the people of Last

Chance have managed to wind up smack in the middle of a fast-paced controversy. For instance, one resident, Don Harris, followed all the proper procedures for having the design of his house approved but ran into problems all along the way.

Nothing in his house, Harris explains, fits the specifications of current building codes. He found that it was illegal to use solar energy to supply the house with electricity, that it was illegal to get his drinking water straight out of a creek, and that a non-flushing toilet that turns human waste into fertilizer has been blacklisted.

"The house even has too many windows," Harris said.

But Harris has kept things the way he wants them despite the codes because he feels they no longer reflect legitimate needs. While the codes were created to avoid health and safety problems, Harris believes they have grown to life-limiting proportions.

Harris blames the change on the composition of the boards charged with refining and enforcing the codes.

The fact that both state and local building standards commissions are composed of construction industry experts bothers Harris because he feels it is in the commissioners' interest that conventional codes are maintained and enforced.

"Building trade unions are among our worst detractors," Harris said, "because they generally feel their jobs are threatened," by people building their own homes.

For just this reason, Harris was particularly upset October 2 when the county Board of Supervisors agreed to let the Building Appeals Board, which is composed of construction experts, hear building permit gripes and rule on them before they are allowed to come before the Supervisors. Harris thinks building codes should be based on political thinking rather than expert trade opinion.

In arguing against the creation of an alternative rural development or "Class K" code, builders have used every kind of logic from "it just wouldn't be fair" to "my conscience won't allow people to live that way" in order to keep a new code from being established.

One of Class K's more vocal local critics has been Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, who recently told the *Phoenix* that her concern is that "there's really no way of telling whether they're really building for speculation."

She also opposes alternative sewage systems because of "inherent dangers" citing tests which reveal that "some kind of organism" breeds in the waste material.

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Keep Out!—defense for the cabin-dwellers of Mendocino.

But even Liddicoat would support some changes in the building code if they were "lowered for everyone."

The question she has is "What do we do when the owner who built the house moves out or dies—there's no way to prevent someone taking it over and stringing wires across the room."

Meanwhile, the people who are alive now and who wish to live in mountain cabins without wires either strung across the ceiling or hidden in walls have no recourse but to break the law. ■

Clifford A. Welch

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