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SC County Planning Process Defended, Criticized At Taxpayer Group Meeting

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In Supervisor Joe Cucchiara's view, the county planning process is a youngster who needs a chance to mature and to make a few mistakes along the way.

But Supervisor Dan Forbus believes this "youngster" is becoming overregulated and is developing an overly complex personality.

These two views on the county planning process were offered by the two supervisors at a lively meeting Monday night of the Organized United Taxpayers in Capitola.

This group, generally opposed to government attempts at more taxation, not only heard from Cucchiara and Forbus, but also from Planning Director Kris Schenk, Planning Commission Chairman Chuck Barr Jr. and Chief of Inspection Services Lou Bacigalupi.

Cucchiara said that planning is a relatively new function of government that is still developing and ought to be given a chance. "We haven't been giving out building permits as long as we have been issuing marriage licenses," he pointed out.

But the supervisor soon was challenged on his statement by Asa Lake, member of the taxpayers' group, who pointed out that the government has been planning for people ever since it placed Indians on reservations.

But Cucchiara stuck to his contention. "A good local example is that Santa Cruz County didn't have a building code until 1955," he pointed out.

Most of the codes written since 1955 came about due to concerns over health and safety, Bacigalupi noted. For instance, the code now requires at least two exits from a bedroom in case of fire.

"The codes have evolved over time through the loss of life and nothing else," Bacigalupi said.

But that doesn't mean, he added, that there aren't unnecessary regulations in the code.

"I agree with you in part that there is overregulation in part in the codes," he told the audience.

Forbus told the group that he believes there's plenty of overregulation in the entire planning process.

At one point in time, Forbus said, there wasn't enough planning to accomplish the orderly growth that was needed. But those days are over, he stated.

"It's my contention that the pendulum as far as the planning process is concerned has gone too far the other way. It's time we stopped bowing to the process for the sake of the process alone."

Forbus was warmly applauded by the group when he said that serving people is the the ultimate thing the planning process should do.

"We have lost sight of why we have a planning process," Forbus stated. "The final sight is to serve the people who live and work in Santa Cruz County . . . but we worship the process more than the results . . ."

"Part of this is brought on by the state (regulations,) but a lot of it is brought on by us. We can fix a lot of it and I hope we will."

Supervisors recently formed a permit processing task force in an attempt to fix the process.

This group has been charged with looking into the complex process of issuing planning permits and finding ways this process can be streamlined.

Cucchiara said this streamlining effort was

necessitated by employee reductions due to budget cuts in the Planning Department.

The department now operates with 87 employees, compared to the 98 it had last year.

People still are demanding services, but also want the amount of government spending reduced, Cucchiara claimed. So, in order to provide the same services with fewer employees, the way the services are given to the public will be streamlined, he explained.

The supervisor was taken to task for this statement by Lee Phelps, member of Organized United Taxpayers.

At the same time the people are asking for reductions in government, Phelps pointed out, the government is imposing more and more regulations that the public must comply with.

In order to prevent any further employee cutbacks this year, Schenk noted, the department raised all its fees to a point where the fees are now paying the full cost of services.

One question from the audience that remained unanswered was whether the county, in determining the full cost of services this year, took into account that some of the services already had been paid for by builders who put up their fees the end of the 1981-82 fiscal year.

If these fees weren't subtracted out in determining the full cost of services, then the new fees are too high, one member of the audience pointed out.

And with many other questions remaining unanswered due to lack of time, the group agreed that in the near future it would again like to meet with those involved in the county's planning process.

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