

Housing Santa Cruz rent control drive begins

by Bob Johnson

A rent stabilization measure will be before Santa Cruz City voters in November if the recently announced petition drive of the Santa Cruz Housing Action Committee (SCHAC) is successful.

In a companion measure, speculation in housing would be discouraged by a steep tax on the profits of selling property held four years or less.

Signature gathering for the initiatives is slated to begin late this month with the hope of qualifying the two measures for the November ballot.

Rents in the city jumped 149 per cent between 1970 and 1976, according to federal census data from those two years.

Even steeper increases in rents could occur in the next few years as recent increases in the cost of new homes are reflected in the rental market; the county growth management program has concluded.

A key to rising rents is a vacancy rate which remains below two per cent despite record levels of construction.

The proposed initiative would automatically lose effect if the vacancy rate rose above five per cent, the federal Housing and Urban Development standard for defining a "housing crisis."

Until then a five member elected board would be empowered to set "fair rent" ceilings and standards for rent changes, and to hear appeals from those standards by individual landlords and tenants.

Newly constructed housing, tourist-occupied establishments and smaller owner-occupied homes would all be exempt from regulation by the fair rent commission.

Landlords of the units included under the proposed law, which comprise the overwhelming majority of rentals in the city, would still be allowed to pass on to their tenants

increases in costs such as taxes and maintenance.

But they would not be allowed to take advantage of the market situation by reaping windfall profits in excess of a "fair return" on investment.

Windfall profit-taking in the tight housing market is also the target of SCHAC's anti-speculation initiative.

Under that measure, the city would impose a steep tax on the profits from reselling housing which has been

held for four years or less. The tax would be higher on housing held for shorter periods of time.

Homeowners who have owned their house for two years, elderly homeowners and hardship cases would be exempted from the stiff tax on real estate transfers.

The purpose of the anti-speculation ordinance is to discourage people from buying up housing for short periods of time and then reselling them at higher prices.

4/13-19/78 Supes save birth center but crisis continues

by Bob Johnson

The besieged county nurse-midwife program won a reprieve Tuesday when county supervisors voted unanimously to begin recruitment of an obstetrician-gynecologist to complete the staff for the program.

The action came amid mounting evidence that a general lack of birthing services in the county amounted to a health care crisis, particularly for low income families and Watsonville area residents.

The Community Hospital midwife program's existence had been threatened because a severe shortage of obstetricians (ob's) in the county has made it almost impossible to recruit private physicians willing to provide supervision.

One of the duties of the new county funded ob will be to provide necessary supervision for the two licensed nurse-midwives in the county's perinatal program.

Under California state law nurse-midwives must be under the supervision of a physician.

In the last month all three private ob's currently providing that supervision have announced their intention to pull out of the program.

Dr. Donald Slebir told the board

Tuesday that the county might not be able to hire a physician willing to work in the midwife program because doctors do not want "to be dictated to by a group of patients."

And Dr. John J. King, president of the Santa Cruz Medical Society, called the program "a failure" because it is too expensive and forces the supervising physician to "sit in the next room and watch TV or read a book" while a nurse-midwife delivers the baby.

King was backed up by Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat who charged that the program is "helping to turn the clock back a century in order to cater to the whims of a few."

But Liddicoat joined in the unanimous decision to bring at least one ob into the area on the county payroll.

The Committee for the Birth Center (TCBC), a group of concerned parents which formed last month when the lack of physician support threatened the Community Hospital's popular Birth Room, expressed strong support for continuing the nurse-midwife program.

In a letter to the board, TCBC argued that the midwives "give emotional support and practical advice which often helps mothers have an easier, less complicated labor."

Countywide real estate transfers were 50 per cent higher in 1977 than in 1974, according to the county clerk's records.

Petitions will begin circulating 21 days after the legal notice of intent to circulate them, which was published early this week.

For more information, or a copy of the proposed measures, contact the SCHAC office at 1004 Ocean Street or call 426-1091. □

The letter also pointed out that the local program "may affect the future of perinatal projects throughout the state" because it is a pilot project.

A number of parents appeared in person Tuesday to offer their praise for the program and urge that the county see that the supervisory services are provided.

In addition to providing that supervision, the new county ob will also be asked to bear a major share of the birth care work in the Watsonville area.

The severe ob shortage in south county has forced many mothers to leave the area in order to find care.

King said the Medical Society has been unsuccessful in its recent attempts to recruit an additional two ob's for the south county area.

But a suspicious Supervisor Ed Borovatz pointed out that the medical establishment has been making promises of bringing in additional physicians to solve the birth care crisis for three years with no results.

Another move made by the board Tuesday was to ask the local private physicians to make good on their promise to treat Medi-Cal patients by signing contracts with the county promising to do so. □