

# Shelter opposition girds itself for battle

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Some of them getting their first taste of local politics, 45 Potrero district merchants and residents met Monday afternoon to organize their strategy to oppose a proposed shelter for the homeless in their neighborhood.

They familiarized themselves with the names of City Council members and procedures at City Hall, particularly the appeal process, should they lose the political battle.

A former city planning commissioner and Zoning Board member offered them some inside tips on what to expect — or not to expect — at council hearings.

"Bring your reading and knitting material. Don't look for sanity. It's not one of the commodities they (council members) trade in," former commissioner Rick Santee told an attentive audience at the meeting in the Sash Mill Cinema Cafe, directly across the street from the shelter site.

"You have a real political hot potato here. I wouldn't look for too much support from the politicians," Santee added.

Santee spoke from experience. Last year, he and a neighborhood group unsuccessfully fought the approval of a shelter at River Street and Golf Club Drive. That facility, proposed by the St. Francis Catholic Housing Project, never became a reality, partly due to financing difficulties.

Potrero shelter organizers, a non-profit group called Citizens Committee For the Homeless, submitted a land-use application to the city Planning Department Monday afternoon for a shelter permit.

The application is the first glance the public has had of the shelter proposal in any detailed form, although council members two weeks ago voted to "express their intentions" to buy a shelter.

That vote was taken in response to a request from Potrero shelter organizer, Page Smith, a university historian, for money from the city to finance the shelter.

As late as Friday, City Manager Richard Wilson reported shelter supporters had yet to submit any formal proposal to the city, even though shelter supporters have been pushing for an immediate move into the structure for the past few weeks.

They seek housing for transients who have been displaced by the shutdown last week of a temporary downtown shelter. It was opened by the non-profit William James Association, with cooperation from county — but not city — officials, as a

way to give street people temporary respite from harsh, rainy weather.

The Potrero structure is a large warehouse and office suite located in a row of commercial buildings, sandwiched between the Sash Mill commercial center and the St. Francis Catholic Soup Kitchen. The Soup Kitchen also has applied to the city for a permit for a permanent shelter, but is not requesting public funds.

Cinema Cafe Manager John Craver told shelter opponents at Monday's meeting, "It is important we keep up our interest in this (shelter plan). It will have a pretty big impact on this area for a long time."

Craver also advised his audience to remember that "the people behind the shelter are very good people and are doing what they think is best."

"They are working hard for very little money to solve a complex problem."

Another shelter opponent, Nancy Rainey, said she is concerned there will be no guarantees, should the shelter be approved, to prevent loitering or other annoyances around the businesses and homes by shelter clients.

Responded Santee: "There are no guarantees. Once it's there, there will be very little control over problems." Santee said every detail of the shelter's operation should be nailed down on paper in order to address neighborhood concerns.

But Santee warned his audience the tendency of council members will be to "gloss over the details."

"They're going to want to just send it through."

The citizens committee has applied for a permit to shelter a nightly average of 35 men, women, women with children, seniors, mentally ill and their families in the 6,400-square-foot building.

The numbers may swell to as many as 65 persons "in a severe emergency, such as torrential rains," according to the application.

Shelter guests would be able to stay for at least one week. For stays of up to 30 days, they would be required to commit to seeking jobs and other goals.

Stays of longer than 30 days would be permitted, in certain cases, to women with children and the mentally ill who find no other shelter, as long as they continue to search for permanent shelter, such as a motel, states the application.

The shelter would operate from 8 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. During those hours, three staff members would be on duty.

The facility would be more than just a shelter.

During the day, social services agencies and programs would operate from the office portion of the building.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

John Craver addresses group.

Proposed agencies include the Shelter Project, County Mental Health Services Agency, Mental Health Services, Human Resources Agency and Ombudsman Advocate.

Shelter rules would ban sexual activity, non-prescription drugs, including alcohol, smoking, loitering outside premises, violence, visitors and pets.

Men and women would sleep in separate areas. Housekeeping chores and quiet times would be required.

Vehicles would be limited to 10 per day.

The committee proposes to build a fence to screen the shelter from the windowed cafe across the street and from other businesses.

Supporters and opponents are expected to jam the council chamber this afternoon when council members continue their discussions of how much taxpayers' money — if any — should be allotted for the shelter.

The purchase price is \$337,000, including a \$110,000 down payment.

Two weeks ago, council members indicated they would earmark federal housing-subsidy grants to the shelter, if federal requirements could be met.

Craver noted the opponents should be prepared for a lengthy series of meetings.

"This will probably drag on for a long period of time," he said.

Not until the issue is finally settled will those at Monday's meeting know whether their first taste of city politics is bitter, or sweet.