

# Board to look at mountain-area repairs

Santa Cruz County Planning Director Dianne Guzman is urging a cautious approach to relaxing tough rules on rebuilding quake-damaged homes in some parts of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

In a report that will be discussed by the supervisors tomorrow morning, Guzman said she was recommending against an ordinance that would allow some mountain property owners to rebuild their damaged homes without a full review of geologic hazards on their property.

The issue arose before Christmas when Santa Cruz County Supervisor Jan Beautz, whose First District includes much of the earthquake-hazard zones in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley per-

suaded Pajaro Valley Supervisor Sherry Mehl to support them in a vote to relax restrictions on rebuilding in the "areas of critical concern" in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Taking a "play-it-safe" attitude, the Planning Department has refused to allow repair or reconstruction of quake-damaged buildings in some areas of the county until a geologist has determined that the property was stable. But in some parts of the mountains, particularly in a zone extending along the summit from Old San Jose Road to Highway 17, experts have said they won't know if the land is stable until a winter's rain has fallen and they know if old landslides in the area are beginning to move again.

Beautz and Keeley argued it

wasn't fair to make many homeowners in the area — some with comparatively minor damage — wait months to begin repairs.

They argued that homeowners should be allowed to rebuild at their own risk. The owners would have to sign liability releases that would be recorded on their property deeds, serving as warnings to future buyers that there may be problems with the property.

Guzman said the proposed ordinance sets a precedent for the county in other areas because it relaxes the county's geological review standards.

"Because the amendment could expose people and property to potential health and safety risks and because it will require that geologic decisions be made without the information from

monitoring, we are unable to recommend approval to your board," Guzman told the board in her memo. "The amendment may expose people to an undetermined but potential substantial risk from earthquake-related ground failure."

Adoption of this ordinance would mean that the county is disregarding certain potential risks, Guzman wrote.

Guzman said the proposed ordinance could also discriminate against property owners with more easily detected hazards, which would have to be alleviated.

"Ultimately, the hazards may be just as great" on properties covered by the proposed ordinance, Guzman wrote.

—Bob Smith