

# No answers for Summit residents?

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SUMMIT — County officials had no answer Wednesday night for the question that was on everybody's mind — "When will be allowed to rebuild our community?"

Over 200 people crowded the Loma Prieta Community Center for the chance to confront four county officials over unpopular rebuilding policies in mountain areas.

Three television crews roamed the crowd while County Supervisors Jan Beautz and Fred Keeley opened the meeting. County Planning Director Dianne Guzman and Environmental Coordinator Pete Parkinson also attended.

Although the crowd was expecting geologists to show up, none did and Guzman said that was because the scientists were busy working on geological studies.

"We've made it through a lot of disasters up here," said Dimone Gabler. "Through the floods and the fire, and I still think we're going to make it thorough the earthquake. But I'm not sure we're going to survive the bureaucracy."

Most of the residents' ire was directed at a new county policy limiting rebuilding of earthquake damaged homes in a number of mountain neighborhoods. Geologists fear that the Oct. 17 quake shook loose a number of ancient landslides in the mountains, which could threaten hundreds of homes if the earth continues moving.

'We've made it through a lot of disasters up here.'

— Summit resident Dimone Gabler.

Badly damaged homes in these "areas of critical concern" cannot be legally rebuilt or repaired until large-scale geological studies are complete - a process that could take one or two years.

County planners and a bare majority of the Board of Supervisors approved the restrictive rebuilding policy, which forbids rebuilding such homes even if the owner signs a waiver assuming all risk for unknown hazards. Many homeowners have said they are willing to sign such waivers in order to save what is left of their homes.

Both Beautz and Keeley, whose districts include the Summit and the San Lorenzo Valley, oppose the policy.

"A lot of you will disagree with this policy," said Beautz. "I disagree with it, but that's what's in place at this time."

Noting that the policy passed on a 3-2 vote, Keeley urged the crowd to flex their political muscle and try to get the policy changed.

"All we need is one more vote to go in the other direction," he said. "This is an issue of essential fairness."

Planning officials had few answers to residents other questions.

Due to the vagueness of geological maps, some people are still unable to tell if their homes are included in the critical areas. Nobody knows yet what the timetable for the geologic work will be. And nobody knows yet how much rain must fall before geologists can consider their studies complete.

Accurate maps of the critical areas should be complete in two weeks, Guzman said. At that time, county workers will determine exactly which parcels are included in the restricted zones. The geologists' timetable will depend on how much rain falls this winter; Parkinson said, and nobody seems sure yet how much rain will be considered enough.

Rainfall is important because geologists need to study ground movement under saturated conditions, Parkinson said.

"Why didn't you bring us more information?" asked resident Michael Ballard. "We have to go home tonight knowing we can't rebuild, we're in limbo. You're giving us nothing to hold onto."

Guzman told Ballard "I came here tonight to tell you as much as we know. That information doesn't exist."

## Patton/ No hidden agenda

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Mountains an unpopulated green-belt area. He has been charged with saying that people are crazy for living in the mountains, that they speculated on their property and should now accept their losses quietly.

"I have never, ever, said anything like that," said Patton. "It's completely untrue. Listen, I grew up in the mountains," he said. "My parents still live in the mountains. I almost had to disqualify myself from voting on (a recent ordinance) because I own property in the mountains that was initially designated a high-risk area," he said.

Much of the residents' frustration revolves around the county's strict policy concerning repair and rebuilding of quake-damaged homes in several "areas of critical concern," where geologists fear ancient landslides may have been shaken loose by the earthquake. The largest single critical area encompasses the Villa del Monte subdivision off Summit Road.

Geologists believe the land beneath Villa del Monte may be "creeping," downhill. The Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to begin a \$600,000 study of suspected

potential slides in the Santa Cruz Mountains, but as yet no land movement has been detected since the quake.

Villa del Monte residents whose homes were not badly damaged by the quake are being allowed to live in their homes. But people whose homes were badly damaged will not be given permits to rebuild until the geological study is complete — which could take up to two years.

Summit residents feel the county policy does not make sense. If residents who wish to rebuild do so at their own risk, why should the county stop them? And if it's unsafe to rebuild in Villa del Monte, why is it safe to live there?

Patton says he supported the policy because he was swayed by the testimony of geologists who had surveyed the area. The policy was narrowly approved on a 3-2 vote, with Supervisors Jan Beautz and Fred Keeley strongly opposing it.

"The testimony by the geologists was very compelling," said Patton. "They showed a significant danger not only to property but also to life. It's a borderline situation," he said. "There's not enough danger to life to evacuate people, but there's enough to say it's imprudent, unwise and dangerous to add more

residents to a dangerous area by allowing rebuilding to take place."

But Beautz believes the policy is "not equitable."

"It seems to be an economic issue more than a safety issue," she said. "If it's a safety issue for some people, then why not for everyone? It should be people's decision whether to invest in what may not be a completely known situation."

At present the county is not drafting a plan to condemn the Villa del Monte or other "critical" mountain neighborhoods, Patton said. But condemnations are a possibility if geologic studies reveal dangerous land movement during the rainy season, he said.

Patton compared Villa del Monte's situation to the county's condemnation of the Love Creek neighborhood in Ben Lomond. A massive landslide destroyed homes and killed several people in the neighborhood during the storms of 1982, and the county later condemned a number of nearby homes located nearby due to danger of further slides.

"Most of those homes were in perfect shape, but we evacuated people and tore down the homes," Patton said.