

Low Erickson starts cleaning

Audit to scrutinize planning efficiency

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The county grand jury has ordered an independent audit of the county Planning Department's management.

The grand jury has received approval from Superior Court Judge Chris Cottle to enter into a \$30,618 contract with the Haryey M. Rose Accountancy Corp. of San Francisco, Planning Director Kris Schenk announced this morning.

Supervisors also learned of the upcoming audit today in a memo from County Administrative Officer George Newell. Newell told them they have no say over the audit since the Superior Court has the power to approve expenses of the grand jury.

However, the \$30,618 will have to come out of the county's already-stretched

budget. Newell will recommend March 22 where the money should come from.

The purpose of the audit, according to Grand Jury Foreman Warren Gilbert in a letter to supervisors, is "to provide more efficient services to Santa Cruz County."

The audit, Gilbert told The Sentinel, will review and evaluate the management structure and productivity, the utilization of staff, fee structures, environmental review practices, all comprehensive planning efforts and the time it takes to process permit applications.

"All planning efforts and the time it takes have been so severely criticized and we have had so many complaints, we've concluded there would be real value in a management and fiscal audit," Gilbert said.

He added the grand jury opted for an

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Truckers' strike support e

ation. said Ms. Lavelle had verbally
Mrs. resign and had helped in drafting the press
noon, release.

Audit

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independent firm because "it would be foolish for laymen and it would be foolish to have done in-house because if you investigate yourself, what happens to your credibility? We don't want those questions to come up."

When Newell and Assistant County Administrative Officer Pat Busch met with the grand jury Jan. 18, the county administrative officer offered his office's services in doing the audit. But grand jury members refused the offer, saying they believed an outside audit is necessary.

Gilbert said the grand jury believes the results of the audit will save the county money.

The Planning Department has been under attack for years by local builders for extensive time delays in processing development permits. Presently, at the direction of supervisors, the department is preparing a new means of permit processing that is designed to be quicker and more efficient.

Schenk welcomed the news of the independent audit, saying he believes auditors will find that the department is doing an excellent job in working toward streamlining the permit process.

"I'm proud of the changes we're making through the Permit Processing Task Force, so I welcome an outside firm coming in," Schenk said.

He added he believes the auditors will find "great improvements in the works."

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