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County Supervisors Bend Rules, Regulations For Rebuilding Of Storm-Damaged Homes

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

County supervisors this morning made initial decisions on the tangle of legal and human problems involved in rebuilding the hundreds of homes and damaged and destroyed in the Jan. 4-5 storm.

The board will allow three years instead of the normal one year for homeowners to rebuild. And, supervisors will cut the cost of a rebuilding permit at least 50 percent.

Basically, the board determined that for any house that is less than 50 percent damaged, the only consideration will be the health and safety of the inhabitants. That means that a house could be rebuilt as it was even though it did not meet today's building standards.

Ultimately, the board must resolve whether emergency demands should allow unrestricted rebuilding of homes damaged 50 percent or more in the floodplains, on bluffs and in known mudslide areas.

County Planning Director Kris Schenk said "In areas where flooding was extensive, but damage was relatively minor, such as Felton Grove, residents should be encouraged to elevate their homes in order to avoid more damage in the future."

He told the board there were about 100 homes that were damaged to an extent they shouldn't be occupied. Earlier, he informed the press that such homes were marked with cautionary yellow tags, but that residents have been allowed to move back in.

Along with the 100 homes, there are hundreds of others damaged to various extents, the county has reported.

Chief Inspector Lou Bacigalupi reported that three mid-county mobile home parks had received major damage and were awaiting county and state approvals to get re-established.

He said The Old Mill Park in Soquel with 39 spaces had 21 homes totally destroyed and 18 were left standing with 12 of them seriously damaged.

The Soquel Mobile Home Park with 18 spaces "was totally wiped out," Bacigalupi said, and reported further that the Aptos Pine Mobile Home Park had two of its homes knocked off piers and a retaining wall washed out.

A large number of mobile home residents were in board chambers this morning to hear what decisions the county would make to get them back home.

Bacigalupi brought forth a ripple of derisive laughter from the audience when he reported that the state government has authority over the interior of the trailers and the county government has authority over the exteriors in approving them for occupancy.

Residents were told they needed no further action from the board and that rebuilding permits should be sought from the administration.

Schenk recommended the county charge only 50 percent of its normal fee for permits and the board was told they may be able to get that 50 percent back from the federal government.

However, Supervisor Dan Forbus said he favored the federal government giving the permits out free no matter what the federal government decided.

Schenk noted it would cost the county a substantial amount if the fees were cut back 50 percent due to the cost

of processing.

Schenk said that the troubled areas need geological assessments and that the county board should deal with rebuilding approvals on a case-by-case basis.

Board members noted this morning it would increase the burden on the board mightily.

Schenk is recommending that in the future, no matter how light the requirements may be on reconstruction, the supervisors take care to create no more flood hazards.

He recommends that homes within flood areas be elevated and that septic systems be prohibited within floodplains.

Disaster Relief Money Distributed

More than \$140,000 was given to storm victims Monday by the Santa Cruz County-wide Citizens Disaster Relief Committee, according to Kathy Chasteen, committee administrative assistant.

The nine community centers in the county, where victims may apply for relief, turned in 201 applications for funds to the committee's County Center headquarters last

week, Chasteen said.

"The recommendations of the centers were followed in, I'd say, 98 percent of the cases," she said.

In some cases, she explained, some of the losses claimed were not covered within committee guidelines, or the applicant had received funds from other sources.

Lost wages, spoiled food and private road repair are not covered, she said. Each case, however, is judged on its individual merits, she emphasized.

"There are always going to be extenuating circumstances; We're trying to avoid rigidity," she said.

The average amount of the checks was \$700, according to Chasteen.

Pam Green, volunteer worker in the Ben Lomond center, said most of the requests were for repairs, or "basic supplies to get their lives back in order," supplies not paid for by government relief agencies.

Of the \$140,363 disbursed yesterday, \$15,640 went to victims in the Ben Lomond area, said Green.

"We don't tell them how to spend the money, more how not to," she explained.

Most of the applications were from individuals, rather than business, Chasteen said.

Fund-raising efforts continue, and several benefits, concerts, and other special events are being planned. The committee hopes to raise \$1 million by May 1.

For further information, call 425-2902. Donations may be made at any County Bank, or sent to the committee at the County Center, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz, 95060.

Rented Homes Won't Get Tax Write-Off Unless Law Changes

Because of a quirk in county law, only those storm damaged homes in which the owners resided can get property tax write-offs this year, County Assessor Robert Petersen told county supervisors this morning.

Rented homes and businesses have to wait until next year's tax periods to get the depreciation, Petersen said as he urged the board to change the rulings to allow the broadest write-offs for this year when many owners have been financially damaged by the floods and mudslides of Jan. 4-5.

The board directed County Counsel Clair Carlson to look into the county ordinance, passed in 1975 to give owners who live here a better break than absentee owners, to see if it can be changed to allow tax cuts this year.

Supervisor Dan Forbus said it should be changed because it will benefit renters to have the homes repaired. Less taxes paid will mean more money for the repairs, Forbus said.

Petersen also repeated that casualty loss reappraisals will not result in any increases in appraisal values of those homes that pre-date Proposition 13 on the valuations.

He explained that if a home is appraised at \$40,000, but could be worth \$100,000 on the free market, then its 50 percent damages will mean it will be appraised this year at \$20,000 and returned to \$40,000 after it is repaired.

The board directed Carlson to return in two weeks, as the board will not meet next week since it is a day following a holiday.