

# 12 percent of Watsonville homes substandard

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A survey of 1,167 Watsonville homes found that 12.3 percent are substandard and in need of repair.

The poll also found another 30.1 percent may be substandard and require closer inspection.

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To no one's surprise, the survey showed that residents of the

substandard homes tended overwhelmingly to be poor Latino renters. Many of the households were headed by women or seniors, the survey said.

The survey was prepared for the city by Palm Springs-based American Development Consultants as part of an application, approved last night by the City Council, for \$500,000 in federal funding for the city's housing improvement program.

The survey, partially financed by

a federal grant, was conducted in two parts. The first, begun the end of February, was a quick scan of city housing by consultants and a team from a Community Action Board's program.

Consultants began with a list of 11,920 addresses on record at City Hall, but found that nearly 2,000 of those were either commercial buildings or empty lots.

In the second phase, 29 percent or 340 of those homes were visited, and surveys, including ques-

tions about income levels, household size, ethnicity, were taken.

The first phase identified 57.54 percent of the homes as sound and 30.12 percent as sound but with possible foundation problems. Of the homes in need of repair, .20 percent were considered to have minor (non-foundation) problems, 12.04 percent had moderate problems, .08 had substantial problems, and .02 percent were considered dilapidated.

Homes in the worst condition

tended to be concentrated in older parts of town, mostly south of the intersection of Freedom Boulevard and Main Street, according to the survey.

The majority of households surveyed - 64 percent - reported an income of 50 percent or less than the area median income, and most were families of three or four. Another 24 percent of households had incomes that fell between under 80 percent and 51 percent of the median.

Seventy percent of the households were Latino, and 69 percent of Latino households had an income less than 50 percent of the median. Nearly 43 percent of the households surveyed were headed by women and/people over 62; seven percent said at least one member of the household is physically or mentally handicapped. Seventy-five percent of these three groups had incomes below 50 percent of median income.

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## HOUSING

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Most of the residents of the run-down houses were renters - 67 percent. Thirty-three percent owned their homes.

The funds applied for by the city will go into a program that provides low-interest loans to homeowners to rehabilitate their home. That program helped rehabilitate 21 units last year and is expected to loan money to 29 this year.

Councilman Todd McFarren, noting that the majority of substandard housing is rented, asked Ned Madonia, the city's housing and economic development director, what programs existed to improve them.

Madonia outlined a few, some of which are funded by money raised through the city's redevelopment project. Madonia and the consultant who headed the survey, Hunter L. Johnson, said city programs have helped improve the situation in the past and should become increasingly effective.

But, he said, "We will never catch up with the need. The need will always be there."

Mayor Oscar Rios said he's

heard complaints that the city's rehab program has too many complex requirements and that applications get bogged down in red tape.

Madonia said some written materials and public orientations are in the works to try to make the process easier to understand. He added that those households identified in the survey would be contacted with information about the various programs the city offers, sort of a "direct-marketing campaign."