

Weed War Proceeds Despite Protests

2-10-65

By Alan Jones
Sentinel Staff Writer

The city council last night ordered the Santa Cruz weed abatement program to proceed, after a 3½-hour public hearing in a jammed council chamber.

Some 100 spectators filled the chamber, most of them seeking exemption from the ordinance or clarification of it. A few attacked the ordinance itself, with the most rousing plea coming from Manuel DeSouza.

DeSouza swore to stand on his property, "gun in hand if need be," to keep any outsider from cutting his weeds. "I still have my constitutional rights," DeSouza said, "and by God, I'll fight for them."

"We are approaching a socialist state," DeSouza said, if citizens allow the city to abate weeds on private property.

"We've got your message," Mayor Norman Lezin interceded drily. "But don't shoot anybody, even on your own property. It's against the law."

The council made some concessions to property owners in ordering the program start. Spraying, which will be used along borders and other hard-to-reach places, will not start until next Monday or later.

The delay is to give property owners who intend to cut their

own weeds time to notify abatement officer Cody Hixon. Hixon said owners must notify him by Monday by a letter giving the owner's name, address, telephone, and assessor's parcel number of all lots involved. The letters will be compiled and the lots taken off the list for spraying.

Disking will start two to three weeks after spraying, given dry weather. Hixon said owners who have sent him the do-it-yourself notice will be expected to clean their lots by the time the contractor has finished his disking for the rest of the city—a 30-day job. At that time, the contractor will disk the remaining lots whose owners have failed to follow through by cleaning.

Hixon and the council emphasized last night that property owners can make their own arrangements for weed abatement. When satisfactory private abatement is done, no city work will be done or city charge made.

Several of the protesters were organic gardeners, who feared damage from sprays. The spraying subcontractor said the sprays used are guaranteed harmless to humans and warm-blooded animals, and said he is bound by U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations. No gardens will be sprayed.

Hixon said weed notices were sent to 2431 property owners, and some 200 already have indicated they will perform their own clearing. The number is expected to double with inclusion of last night's protesters and further letters received through this week. Hixon said his office will welcome all calls on specific problems, but said a letter is needed to get a lot on the exempted list.

Eight protest letters were read, and 28 members of the audience made verbal protests. Among their main points, and the city's answers:

—Will the disking cause erosion? Contractor C. J. Simms said he has been in the business 22 years on the peninsula, including hilly communities, with no erosion problems resulting. Hixon said the city does not plan to disk steep lots where soil might wash as a result.

—Will government-owned land be cleaned? Hixon said state officials have agreed to pay for abatement on state land, and city owned land will also be cleaned by Simms.

—Will pasture land be cleaned of grass? Land in pasture use will be left alone, Hixon said, but if the land is sold and no longer used as pasture, the stand of grass will be cleaned.