

MAYORS

New mayor focuses on local control

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SANTA CRUZ — Newly-elected Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt plans a "positive" administration that will emphasize a sound local economy, affordable housing, a master plan for the San Lorenzo River and protection of neighborhoods.

Wormhoudt, who was unanimously elected mayor by the City Council on Tuesday for a one-year term, said a feasibility study for a performing arts center in the Civic Auditorium will be important in terms of local economic development based on the arts and tourism.

She wants local dollars to stick in Santa Cruz to solidify the local economy and "to protect us from large and environmentally-questionable developments, such as electronics research and development parks."

She hopes a recently created city task force on the river will "play a major role in convincing the Army Corps of Engineers that we have to have a new river plan that is aesthetically and ecologically superior, but won't cost either the city a fortune for dredging, or the property own-

ers a fortune in flood insurance costs."

Added the mayor: "The river is potentially a very valuable asset, but unless we can advocate strongly to the federal agencies that have control, we are going to remain in a position of it being a real detriment, instead of an asset."

Disagreement between the city and federal government over the Corps' design of the river levees and the degree of flood protection has been an ongoing dispute.

As far as downtown business is concerned, Wormhoudt sees it as "extremely healthy," but she worries about its "boutiquization."

She notes that stores patronized by local residents have folded in favor of stores geared to tourists. And she has seen locally-owned stores replaced by franchises.

The competition between local and out-of-town merchants is a "real problem," says Wormhoudt. She finds it ironic that as downtown has prospered, rents have risen to the point that space is unaffordable to some local merchants.

Wormhoudt, 47, was elected to the council in 1981 with a strong liberal backing

Please see back of section

New mayor's focus

Continued from Page A1

and support from feminists and neighborhood groups.

As mayor, she knows it will be difficult to balance the wants of the neighborhoods with the need for cheaper housing.

The protection of neighborhoods and the development of "affordable" housing "are often seen as competing interests, but are both of absolute critical importance to the future of the city," she said. "I think we are going to have to be very sensitive to maintaining that balance."

She said decisions affecting neighborhoods need to be made on a case by case basis — "you make the decisions by being fair. You may look at a wonderful housing project, but, if it will ruin the neighborhood, it won't work.

"On the other hand, that doesn't mean neighbors have a right to insist that every vacant parcel in town remains vacant.

"There is little (undeveloped) land left. We have an obligation to use it efficiently."

The mayor also addressed these issues:

• **SLUM CONDITIONS AT BEACH FLATS** — "In terms of city action, I think the best bet is to use what money we can for housing rehabilitation projects. We haven't been very successful in getting such projects in Beach Flats.

"The parcels are so junky, but there is no place for the people to go. You can't displace people when you do rehabilitation, but you can't overcrowd them either. It's a Catch-22.

"The city has tried new parks, streets and better traffic patterns to protect the neighborhood." She said over half the Beach Flats units are owned by out-of-town landlords, and over 90 percent are rentals.

• **ZONING LAWS** — The council will attack the tedious work of revising the whole zoning ordinance "to bring the zoning code into conformance with the needs of the people."

She hopes the revision, combined with a new code enforcement officer in the planning department, will "improve city service to the public in land-use matters." She does not see the new enforcement officer as a "vigilante force of one," whose crackdown on housing code violations will result in residents being displaced from their homes, but as someone to respond to the persistent complaints — such as the operation of auto body shops in residential neighborhoods.

• **CABLE TELEVISION SERVICE** — The council will look at proposals for a new cable television franchise. "People have complained for years about our cable television service. The bottom line is finding the best proposal that guarantees good service at an affordable price, and guarantees of continued affordability."

• **HAZARDOUS MATERIALS** — The council will draft a hazardous materials disclosure ordinance to follow along the lines of a county ordinance.

• **GOLF CLUB DRIVE AREA** — Wormhoudt sees this area as a "transition" zone between the city and open space. Citing limitations in roads and services, she does not foresee high-density housing for this area. "It seems this should be a transition area between more dense urban areas and open space."

How much agreement there will be with Wormhoudt's view of the city remains to be seen throughout the year.

It is an election year, and she plans to run for a second term in the fall.

One thing is certain: there will be plenty of public hearings for residents to attend.