

A problem made worse

Quake pulls lid off city's simmering housing crisis

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE'S housing shortage — already a problem before the Oct. 17 earthquake rendered 250 homes uninhabitable and seriously damaged 800 more — isn't likely to be solved any time soon.

One year after the earthquake, some 80 families are still living in trailers brought in by the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Crestview Drive and other locations in the Watsonville area. Approximately 14 families, or 50 people, who did not qualify for aid from FEMA or other agencies, are housed in motels through the Motel Voucher Program of the Community Action Board. Many of them have been unable to find housing.

In July, fires that broke out at two houses on Elm and Lincoln streets displaced 50 people, underscoring the continued problem of overcrowding in Watsonville. No one was injured in the fires, but several of the families lost their homes.

A housing task force, formed in January by the Watsonville City Council, estimated that an additional 2,600 units would have to be built to relieve overcrowding. Ninety more units would have to be built each year just to keep up with population growth, the task force said.

Although the city is far from having built 2,600 units, there has been a flurry of housing-related activity in the last year.

Following the earthquake, the city did 7,887 building inspections. Nearly 300 homes were red-tagged — designated unsafe to enter.

Of the earthquake-damaged homes, 50 were demolished. Since the earthquake, the city planning department has issued 1,594 building permits, about 1,000 more than it normally issues in a year. Some people are still waiting for financ-

ing and others, unable to pay for repairs at all, are relying on volunteer rebuilding efforts, but reconstruction is going on all over town. The city estimates that damaged housing reconstruction is 60 percent complete.

In addition, permits have been issued for 200 new units.

Over the last year, the city has moved several new housing projects forward. Among them are the Landmark Estates project, which proposes to build 900 houses, townhouses and apartments on the city's west side, a number of which would be set aside as affordable housing. The project is in the environmental review phase, and the city recently made the zoning changes necessary for the affordable-housing component of the project.

A 52-unit affordable-housing project is being planned for 3.87 acres on Atkinson Lane. The project is a joint effort of the Santa Cruz Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity, and will include both for-sale and rental units for poorer people.

The Housing Authority has two other projects planned for the Watsonville area. Plans for a 16 three-bedroom townhouses on a 3.3-acre site on Clifford Avenue have received preliminary approval; and the Housing Authority is in escrow on an 11-acre parcel Green Valley Road where it hopes to build 120 homes.

Another low-cost housing project, a 24-unit farm-worker-family project, is being proposed by the Pajaro Valley Affordable Housing Development Corp. for the 100 block of West Lake Avenue. Low-cost family housing is also planned for the 100 block of Main Street by a group called Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association.

Other projects include the renovation of the Resetar Hotel, which would be reserved for housing for

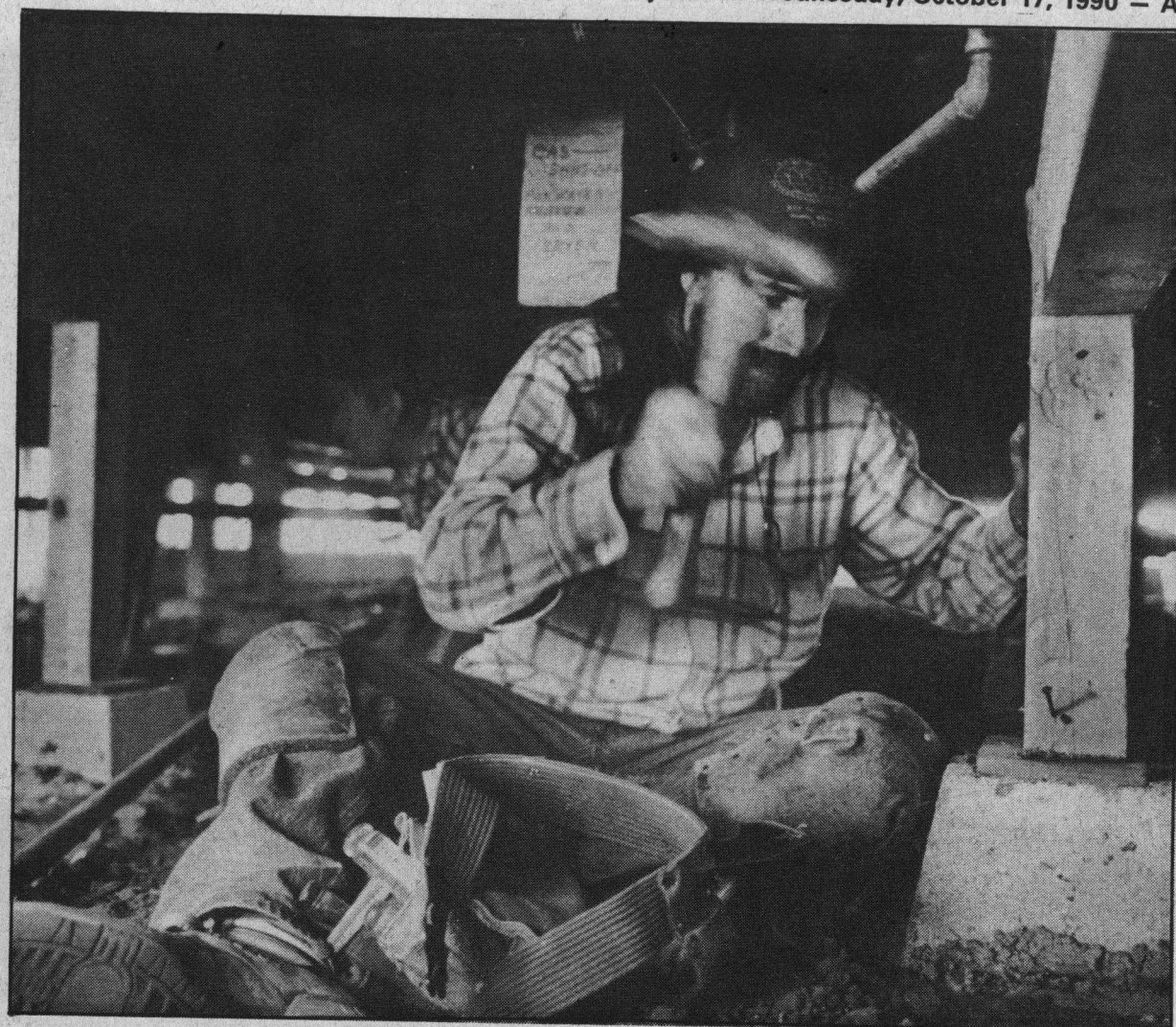
the elderly, and the purchase and renovation of the Jefsen Building, which would be used for farm-worker housing. Both projects are being carried out by the San Jose-based Housing for Independent People.

Money given to the city of Watsonville by the Red Cross — \$1.7 million — was used for various housing projects: \$795,000 went to CHISPA to acquire land for rental units; \$195,000 is being used by the city in conjunction with some state funds for 56 farm-worker housing units; \$230,000 was given to Pajaro Valley Shelter Services to buy and rehabilitate a 3-bedroom house and duplex;

\$300,000 has been set aside for use by the Pajaro Valley Affordable Housing Corp. for land purchases; \$100,000 will be used by the city and Farm Bureau in cooperation with the Housing Authority for 16 farm-worker rental units and 16 farm-worker ownership units; and \$99,000 has been designated for grants to individuals with housing needs as a result of the earthquake.

The city's Earthquake Relief Fund, which topped \$800,000, was given mostly to individuals to help pay for housing repairs. The city also gave a good chunk of the money — \$211,000 — to the Housing Authority as a matching grant for farm-worker housing.

The city's Housing Task Force made several other recommendations to the city, including the implementation of a 25-percent affordable housing inclusionary ordinance and a rent control ordinance.



Kurt Ellison

Construction workers like carpenter Larry Dunlap have been kept busy with repairs and new building for the past year.



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