

Live Oak group says being taken advantage of

By CANDACE ATKINS

Nearly 100 Live Oak residents met Tuesday of last week with First District Supervisor Dan Forbus to complain about what they feel is shoddy treatment of the unincorporated area by the County — namely, the large amount of new construction of low income housing that has taken place in Live Oak.

Without exception, the residents did not hold Forbus or his appointed planning commissioners, Ivan "Skip" Eberly and alternate Winn Alexander, responsible for the what they feel is the disproportionate amount of low-cost, high-density construction underway in Live Oak. Instead, they blamed "the liberal majority," supervisors Gary Patton, Robley Levy and Joe Cuccheria, for allowing 45-percent of the new low cost housing constructed in the last year to be built in Live Oak.

Measure J, the county ordinance that requires builders to construct at least 15 percent of their development as low and moderate income housing, was attacked, and some audience members vowed to start proceedings to have the measure placed on the ballot again in an effort to have it repealed.

For now, builders are allowed, through "transfer of credits," to construct expensive housing in other areas of the county and fulfill their low income housing requirements elsewhere — usually Live Oak, where land is still relatively inexpensive. Currently, there are two such developments underway in Live Oak that will open more than 200 units in the unincorporated area.

"Out of 13 planning districts in the county, 45-percent of the permits issued this year for low and moderate income housing, have gone to Live Oak," said Dick Little, newscaster for KSCO, and guest speaker at the meeting.

Supervisor Forbus

agreed, saying, "It's absolutely imperative that people have a place to live, but when a developer meets the 20-percent low and moderate income housing requirement through Measure J, it's always (located) in Live Oak."

He later added, "The spirit of Measure J has been changed. The idealistic intent (for a financial and social mix in neighborhoods) that brought Measure J around has disappeared. We are now segregating the poor again.

"I don't want to leave you with the idea that there is nothing you can do about Measure J. You can gather enough signatures to put it back on the ballot. There will be a time when this (an effort to repeal Measure J) is right — just call me when you feel the time is right to put it back on the ballot," he said.

Inspired by Forbus' suggestion, some audience members vowed to go beyond Measure J and consider a recall movement of what they called "the social thinkers," supervisors Levy, Cucchiara and Patton.

Winn Alexander, in a brief presentation, received applause when she told the audience, "They're still building here. Why? Because we haven't gotten mad enough. We don't have to take it laying down; we do have to organize."

LOCO, originally formed to pressure the county to repair storm damage in Live Oak last winter, has become a more broad-based group, encompassing what organizer Carl Johns describes as "multi-issues."

"We are a permanent organization. You can't function (with the County) without this kind of organization. We have tremendous clout in numbers," he said.

Although he said the group is "apolitical," he told the audience, "We don't support politicians per se, but we quickly see who is working for us. Wayne Moore and

Dan Forbus go gently along with our needs. We have two supervisors that support Live Oak. The other three, unfortunately, haven't as yet. That's a political fact of life."

Forbus said a combined effort with Watsonville (Moore's supervisorial area) to repeal Measure J might "be a reality."

Another suggestion is a lawsuit against the county for allowing construction that changes what Ms. Alexander called "the flavor" of a

ning commissioner Eberly, who told the audience, "I'm really going to set you on fire."

Eberly said that afternoon, the planning commission had voted to recommend to supervisors that the criteria for high density development be changed to allow such construction on streets that eventually feed in to a main artery, instead of requiring them to be one quarter mile or less from an "arterial."

"Now, high density housing (apartments) can be on any collector

street," said Eberly. "That leaves no part of Live Oak out — now, (if the recommendation is approved by supervisors) 90 percent of Live Oak can be high density.

"Congratulations, you liberals," Eberly muttered. "I have a heck of a time holding my temper (in planning commission meetings)."

It was not until the end of the more than three-hour meeting that a heated exchange developed.

A woman, standing in the back of the room,

said when she arrived at the meeting, she was "enthusiastic," but after hearing of the seemingly hopeless plight of Live Oak, she "became more and more confused."

"Is this hopeless?" she asked. "Besides, you have to address these poor people — they have a right to live somewhere."

Ms. Alexander assured the woman that "numbers make a difference" in pressuring county officials.

"Levy is the weak link," Ms. Alexander

continued. "When she sees the people (at supervisors' meetings), she bends. She's up for reelection."

Ms. Alexander brought applause when she concluded, "Numbers do make a difference. If we didn't believe that, we'd still be part of the colonies."

Audience members were encouraged to join LOCO; new recruits were signed up during the coffee break and after the meeting. At present, there are no further meetings scheduled.