

Seniors Housing Plan In Utter Chaos

By TOM HONIG

Sentinel Staff Writer

Does order really come out of chaos, or was some philosopher just shooting off his mouth?

The developers of a proposed senior citizen housing facility in Santa Cruz hope that the philosopher was right. Santa Cruz City Planning Director Bob Lawrence thinks he was. And one senior citizen activist, Lawrence Stickles, hopes some order comes out of a housing shortage which is bankrupting senior citizens and sending them to garbage cans in search of food.

The housing shortage in Santa Cruz, as dozens of house-hunters can attest, is severe. For the elderly, the situation is dire.

C. Renwick Breck, a native Santa Cruzan who now is the chairman of Alternatives for Aging for the San Francisco Area Futures Planning Council of the Episcopal Diocese of California,

painted a gloomy picture for seniors in this area. He said that over 900 units are needed — now — for senior citizens in the Santa Cruz area. What's worse, he said, is that that figure is increasing by 300 units per year.

"What is happening is that the housing stock is giving out. It's affecting people mostly at the poverty level."

Stickles, a Santa Cruz senior citizen and self-styled "agitator," was more graphic. His eyes flashing from behind his thick glasses, he said that when rents climb, seniors on fixed incomes must use food money for rent. "That's why these people are eating dog food or are eating out of a garbage can."

In response to the woes of the elderly, the federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has awarded a Walnut Creek developer with a contract to build a 150-unit senior citizens residential area on Frederick Street. The development would include 122 federally-subsidized units.

The federal aid sounds fine, but the situation presently is in

utter confusion. HUD is hurrying the developer to gain local approval for the project; the Santa Cruz City government wants time to sound out the citizenry to see if there is popular support for it.

In other words, one level of government says "Hurry;" the other says "be patient."

The name of the project is Villa de Branciforte, and its developer, Ivan Netter, detailed its history.

In June, HUD reserved funds for the project, which includes studio and one-bedroom units, a dining room where residents eat twice a day, a library, recreation room, swimming pool, music room and self-contained security system.

Under a HUD program, 122 of the tenants could receive federal rental assistance. Under the program, those who qualify pay only one-quarter of their monthly income for rent, and the difference between that amount and the rent is paid by federal tax money.

When Netter met with the city planning staff, a few problems surfaced. One had to do with the size of the units: the studio apartments are 400 square feet; the one-bedroom units are 575 square feet. The planning people told Netter, he said, that the units might be too small. There might be density problems as well, not to mention parking and other concerns.

The proposed development is opposite Community Hospital, and is zoned for professional offices. Because of the zoning, the developers would need a use permit, which involves a series of discussions and public hearings.

All those factors add up to time, which the developers don't have.

HUD is breathing down their necks, and has set a Sept. 30 deadline for the developers to receive an indication from the city that the community wants the project. If the developers don't receive the support, the money will go someplace else.

(Continued on Page 2)

Viking Antenna Still Functions

PASADENA (AP) — Viking from earth to the lander also where electronic devices are

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Weather

MONTEREY BAY AREA — Low overcast along the coast through Labor Day extending inland nights and mornings. Variable high cloudiness with a chance of sprinkles or thundershowers. Continued cool. Lows in the 50s. Highs in the 60s to low 70s. Northwest winds 10 to 20 mph afternoons and evenings. Monterey 54-64.

Santa Cruz temperatures for the period ending at 5 p.m. Saturday: High 66, Low 59.

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(Continued from Page 1)

Dirk Murphy, a HUD representative in San Francisco, said "there is a tremendous competition for the funds."

So, to put the matter back into philosophical terms, here is the chaos: a clash of policies between two government levels against a backdrop of a woeful lack of housing for senior citizens.

Where will the order come from?

Bob Lawrence, the city planning director, said it must come from the citizens of Santa Cruz.

"Nobody knows what will be permitted on that property. It has to be taken through the regular processes, and it's hard to predict what will happen."

Back at HUD, Murphy said the feds don't need final approval — just an indication. "If it looks like the city will take a favorable position and if the project is feasible, everything will be all right. We have to get at least informal indications that the administrative machine is operating."

There it is. But what kind of indications does HUD need?

Lawrence said he has received the environmental impact report "and we're going to try to move heaven and earth to get it on the zoning board agenda as soon as we can."

The key to it all will be reactions from the public, Lawrence said. "At the zoning board, and other meetings, we will put it

before the public. How else do I know if it is acceptable to the town?

"If I could get some sort of feeling from the community that I could tell HUD that I think the project will go, they (HUD) will save the money for this project."

We are in desperate need of housing for senior citizens in this town."

He said that recent policies by the council have gone toward smaller developments than the mammoth Villa de Branciforte. However, he pointed out, a full-service facility for the elderly is not economically feasible unless it is big enough to support a large staff to run it.

Netter said he plans to employ a staff of 40 persons "mostly from Santa Cruz."

Lawrence said an ultimate decision on Villa de Branciforte will come from the public. If at an upcoming meeting there is strong opposition to the project, HUD will take its money elsewhere. If the townsfolk want the project, they better make their feelings known before HUD drops it, he said.

Lawrence urged the public "to look beyond the game at people who are suffering. There are 122 people who desperately need decent housing. That should be foremost in our minds."

"It's easy to lay all our problems on lousy government. But now we have got a chance to make a decision."