

Drunk-tank plan angers neighbors

Drug Abuse Center
Live Oak 'sobering facility' OK'd

By KATHY KREIGER
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Harbor residents already dislike having an alcohol treatment center in their midst. Over their protests, however, the county supervisors this week agreed to allow a mini-drunk tank at Janus treatment center at Seventh Avenue near East Cliff Drive.

The six-bed program known as a "sobering facility" will start Jan. 1. It will be the first in the county.

Drug and alcohol treatment officials say it would cost the county less than sending habitual public drunks to jail or Dominican Hospital, saving as much as \$525 per incident.

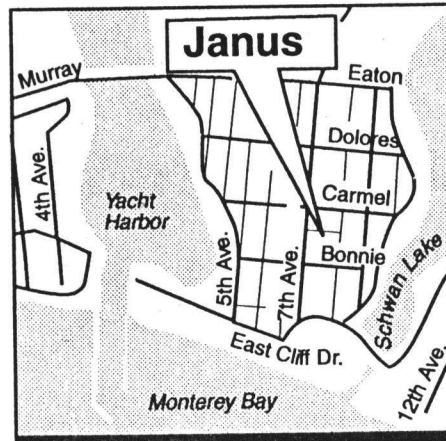
As a residential alcohol treatment and counseling center, Janus already is licensed to treat alcoholics. So county officials say the new service should have no effect on the neighborhood. Further, they say, drunks who are violent, belligerent, suicidal or medically fragile won't be treated there.

Neighbors aren't buying it.

"This is an issue of neighborhood integrity," said Georgia Ackley, who lives one street over from Janus. "... This is not the place for this."

Ackley described the disadvantages of living next to an alcoholic treatment center.

"Drunks eliminating in your front yard. People coming in your house if you don't keep the doors locked. Thefts in the neighborhood," Ackley said. "I could go on for hours."



Chris Carothers/Sentinel

The new service would burden an area that already shoulders its share of social-service programs, said another neighbor.

"Everyone agrees Janus would never get through (the county planning process) today," she said. "To ask us to do more is unfair. It's a drunk tank, essentially, with no lockdown."

Like others, she worried that once drunks are dropped off at Janus, there is nothing to keep them there.

"They can literally open the door and walk out," she said.

Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beautz supported the neighbors, even though she no longer represents that area. Board Chairman Gary Patton, who does, was sympathetic but willing to give the pro-

gram a chance to prove itself.

County health officials want to spend less tax dollars when dealing with public inebriates.

Such people now are arrested and taken to the Water Street jail. It costs the county \$111 per night.

Some savvy habitual drunks, however, have learned the magic words "I'm suicidal" gets them taken to the relative comfort of Dominican Hospital, said Bill Manov of the county's Alcohol and Drug Treatment program. That costs the county \$600 per night.

At \$75 per night, Janus would not only be cheaper, it also would be a "humane alternative to the jail," Manov said.

The cities of Capitola and Santa Cruz are helping pay for the \$86,000 program, and drunks picked up there can go to Janus. They will be expected to stay at least eight hours, then are driven either to the Homeless Resource Center in Santa Cruz, or to where they were picked up.

County planners said the new service falls under Janus' use permit, issued in the mid-'70s. But Beautz looked up the permit, and said it doesn't. She suggested Janus should apply for a revised permit.

"When it's a county facility, the rules seem to change," Beautz said. "... I have a problem with this double standard."

Patton agreed to require Janus to update its permit. He recommended contracts with Capitola and Santa Cruz to address neighbors' worries about noise and lighting. He also recommended setting up a 24-hour complaint line, and



Beautz

County has 'double standard.'

requiring quarterly reports to the supervisors.

That way, he said, "We could pull the plug at any time."

Beautz wasn't convinced.

"It's like a mini-jail," she said. "... It's not fair to put this in people's neighborhood and they have to complain if there's a problem."

Other supervisors disagreed, voting 3-2 to approve the service in concept and asking staff to develop the policies Patton proposed. Voting no with Beautz was Aptos Supervisor Walt Symons.