

Watsonville asks more study of rent control

Low-income requirement gets the nod

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WATSONVILLE — The City Council Tuesday approved in concept most of the 30 recommendations of the Housing Task Force, but decided to study further the controversial issue of rent control before making a decision on it.

At Councilman Lowell Hurst's

suggestion, the council decided to appoint a committee composed of renters, landlords and City Council members to look into a rent-control ordinance.

The council heard many pros and cons on the issue at a three-hour hearing last week, and last night heard more conflicting testimony on the issue.

The council previously adopted a one-year rent stabilization ordinance for earthquake-damaged rentals that receive city help in rebuilding. The law limits rents to their pre-quake rate, and gives renters who were displaced the first right to move back in once the

units have been repaired.

Without much discussion of the volatile issue, the council quickly agreed to study the matter more.

One of the key points approved by the council last night was a zoning ordinance requiring developers to set aside 25 percent of their homes for low- and moderate-income residents.

The law, commonly called an "inclusionary zoning ordinance," would apply to developments of five or more dwellings.

Councilwoman Betty Murphy cast the lone dissenting vote, saying the 25 percent figure would "make it difficult to attract developers."

Mayor Todd McFarren replied

that "If the City Council 10 years ago had passed a 15-percent inclusionary ordinance, we wouldn't need 25 percent today."

In a tandem move, the council also approved a recommendation to "encourage" Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties to increase their affordable housing requirements to 25 percent. Santa Cruz and Monterey counties require developers to set aside 15 percent of their units for low- to moderate-income families.

The council referred another hot topic — waiving off-site improvements for low-income housing — to staff for more study.

Murphy objected to any reduction in standards for such things

as parks, streets and lighting in low-income projects, saying, "I honestly don't think we should have lower standards for low-income housing."

She said the city has come to the point where developers have to pay their way on these items.

Councilman Parr Eves said the aim wasn't to lower the standards but to offer incentives to developers. But the council unanimously agreed to study the issue more.

Murphy also voted against a recommendation to grant amnesty to substandard "accessory" dwellings.

"To me, accessory units means

garages, and I just can't see these meeting our building codes," she said.

Eves said the suggestion was designed to bring these units up to code, and was joined by four other council members in supporting the plan.

On a proposed resale tax, the council agreed to refer the issue to the city attorney for an opinion on whether it was legal. The tax would be charged whenever any property in the city is sold. The money would go into a fund for building low-income housing. Double taxes would be charged anyone who sold a property within two years of owning it.