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Santa Cruz has laid the groundwork to convert this building at Highway 1 and River Street into a shelter

Homeless

SC council paves the way for shelter

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The foundation has been laid to convert a building at the corner of Highway 1 and River Street in Santa Cruz into a shelter for the homeless.

The Santa Cruz City Council unanimously took steps last night to pave the way for a joint effort with the county to have a permanent shelter for the homeless at the location.

The council's actions last night included adopting a plan in concept in which the city would negotiate to purchase the property. The county would then contribute funds to operate the shelter until it has as much equity in the shelter as the city did with its original purchase.

The purchase cost of the 1.4-acre site could be as much as \$600,000. Operational costs of the 30-bed shelter are estimated to be \$106,000 annually.

In the recent past, UCSC, which owns the 2,700-square-foot building, has used it for extension classes. But the university now wants to sell the building, and it has agreed to give the city of Santa Cruz the exclusive right to bid on the

property through Sept. 30.

Laura Brown, assistant city manager, noted that the city has already set aside \$114,000 of Community Development Block Grant funds toward a shelter, and \$89,000 in unassigned grant funds is also available.

Mayor Michael Rotkin noted

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— Carl Foytik

that the proposed plan would mean the city would be putting more money up front, but that the county would meet this over time. The county has expressed its wish not to run the shelter directly.

The City Council also decided to begin processing a use permit for the shelter so that if the building is purchased, it can open as soon as possible.

Council member Jane Weed said this was important to avoid the "awkward situation"

that arose last winter when an emergency shelter was opened in downtown Santa Cruz without any sort of public hearing.

Councilman Joseph Ghio agreed that the process for obtaining a use permit should begin as soon as possible so that neighbors will have a

unsuccessful candidate for a council seat.

Foytik argued that the purpose of the shelter ought to be to provide shelter, not social services. "I don't think that the program is appropriate because the emphasis is on reshaping people's lives," he said.

Katy Sears-Williams was the only council member to criticize the plan, although for different reasons than Foytik.

"For years, we've been talking about selling our buildings," she said. "Now we're buying. I wish we could have gotten further in our selling before this."

She also questioned the county's "credibility" in matters such as this. She said that the county has done a poor job in its commitments to mental health and on the Library Board. "And we know what they did last winter in dumping a shelter in our city," she added.

"This is not as good a proposal as we would like to see," Sears-Williams said, "but it's the best available."

If the necessary agreements can be made, the shelter may be open by Nov. 1.

chance to comment on the proposed location.

The proposed shelter would also double as a center for counseling, health and employment services to the homeless. Among the proposed rules are that guests who are capable of working must find employment within the first two weeks of their stay at the shelter.

This evoked the only public response to the proposal, from Carl Foytik, an audience member who was previously an