

The homeless make their case

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A hearing on how to help the homeless in Santa Cruz County got off to an unusual start yesterday when a woman broke out in song as two companions did some break-dancing for the Board of Supervisors.

In her song, Judy Moore urged the board to help the underdogs, and in particular to do what it can to provide emergency shelter for the homeless.

On a more conventional note, the supervisors heard a report from Susan Mauriello, director of the county's Human Resources Agency, about the homeless. At the end of the hearing supervisors voted to have her look into the possibility of establishing a campground or other shelter for those without homes.

Mauriello estimated there are 1,000 homeless people in Santa Cruz County, a large number of whom are parents with children. The supervisors spent yesterday afternoon taking testimony mostly from people who are living on the streets or in cars or vans.

Many who spoke told the board they are not asking for a handout, just for some help.

"Wanting something for noth-

ing is something that has to be put aside," said Michael Hilgers. "I am willing to organize people to clean up the city in exchange for the plumbing needed for showers."

Another man said he and others already know how to build showers, but haven't done so because they have no permanent place to stay. They cannot put showers in the parks where they now sleep. But if the county set up a shelter or campground, they would be happy to build their own showers.

Paul Brindell of the Shelter Project, which provides some emergency shelter in Santa Cruz, said he supported the county's plan to set up a task force, and urged that the task force get to work immediately.

"We want solid results before it gets dangerous out there again," Brindell said. "(This problem is) absolutely solvable by this winter."

Jane Imler, who said she has been organizing the homeless, suggested the county could provide emergency shelter by using some county land as campgrounds or by setting up an emergency shelter in the Loudon Nelson Center during bad weather.

"I think this county lacks the

heart," Imler told the supervisors. "Why else would women and children be forced to sleep outside?"

"While you sit on your hands and do nothing, lives are being bankrupted. You, as the keeper of the keys in this county, bear a direct responsibility," she said.

One speaker, Nance Lee McKendrick of a group calling itself PEOPLE, told the supervisors about the newspaper her group published about the plight of the homeless. PEOPLE had hoped some of those who read the paper would offer assistance, McKendrick said, but only two responded.

"Unfortunately, if it isn't their immediate problem, it is not their problem — I'm talking about the general public," she said. "It's in your laps."

The supervisors were impressed that many of the speakers were offering to help in some way to provide shelter and showers.

"The tenor of the testimony was that folks who are asking for assistance are saying with the same breath they want to be a key player to make it happen," Supervisor Joe Cucchiara said.

"I'm not willing to spend the taxpayers' money for the person

who walks up here and says, 'I'm a gypsy and I like it that way,'" Supervisor Dan Forbus said. "But I will work with the people who really want to do something with themselves."

The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the long list of recommendations made by Mauriello. They include, besides the establishment of a task force, urging the state and federal governments to provide money for emergency shelters and developing a list of resources available for the homeless.

Mauriello was directed to continue working with legislators for the passage of bills to help the homeless, and to research what lands may be available for an emergency shelter or campground.