

Homeless shelter is OK'd

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By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — City Council members Tuesday agreed to join hands with county supervisors to develop a 30-bed shelter for the homeless on River Street at Highway 1.

The shelter will be in a 10-room building now owned by the University of California.

Council members unanimously voted to submit an offer to university officials by Sept. 30 for purchase of the building and 1.5 acre parcel.

The property is expected to cost the city from \$580,000 to \$600,000. Another \$13,000 is needed for renovation, according to Assistant City Manager Laura Brown.

Council members agreed to negotiate an agreement with the county in which the city would purchase the property and the county would pay an equal amount for operation of the shelter.

Council members agreed the shelter should be the hub of a countywide shelter network.

If there is not enough room in the shelter on any given night, shelter seekers should be shuttled to other available shelters in the county, council members decided.

Council members made it clear

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they want the county's share to come from "discretionary" funds, not from funds that county supervisors are already required by the state to spend on certain needs for homeless people.

The cooperative effort with the county over the development of this shelter is a switch from last year's relationship between city and county officials over the development of a temporary shelter on Cedar Street.

There were hard feelings between city and county officials at that time, because the county had gone ahead with plans for the Cedar Street shelter without first getting a go-ahead from council members.

But county and city officials have been meeting regularly in recent months in a cooperative vein to iron out differences over the River Street-Highway 1 project. Also attending the meetings have been representatives from the Community Foundation, a private, non-profit group.

City officials are hoping for private donations. And, they have already agreed to set aside \$114,000 in federal housing funds toward purchase of the property.

Brown said an additional \$89,000 in

federal Community Development Block Grant funds could be available for the shelter acquisition.

Council members also approved a set of rules for the shelter.

Mayor Michael Rotkin acknowledged "there are probably people (who want shelter) who don't want to live by the rules."

But, he said they would have to go elsewhere, because the shelter — as a taxpayer-supported program — would have to be run by certain rules.

Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams objected that the council would be siphoning off federal grant money for the shelter that could be used for housing for other low-income people.

Councilman John Laird said it is about time that homeless people benefited from some of the federal housing grants.

Council members directed city staff to start processing a permit for the shelter. Public hearings will be held later on the permit application.

Councilman Joe Ghio noted that if an appeal is filed to approval of the permit, the council would decide the appeal.

"The irony of it all is that an appeal would come to the body making the proposal," said Ghio.