

New home for winter shelter proposed

Homeless - 2000
Shifting sleepers from
armory to Harvey West
would save thousands

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SANTA CRUZ — After years of busing tired homeless residents to the Santa Cruz Armory to sleep during winter nights, the Homeless Services Center hopes to finalize a deal that would shelter 75 to 100 people each night for five to six months in an empty warehouse in Harvey West, beginning in November.

"I just think this is the right time to do this and the right idea," said Doug Loisel, the center's director.

But while the move would mean thousands of dollars in savings for the cash-strapped nonprofit, Harvey West businesses fear it also could exacerbate the illegal activity they deal with daily from a small group of people who loiter near the Homeless Services Center on Coral Street at Highway 9.

"It's very common for someone to pull up in front of our place and inventory their world belongings," said Walker Woolever, who owns Polar Automotive and Radiator on Coral Street across from the homeless shelter. His son, Greg, runs the business. "Do you know what this looks like to a prospective customer?"

Woolever said the family also deals with abandoned trash, human waste and drug paraphernalia on their property, problems he fears could grow worse with a nighttime shelter nearby instead of at the armory. The armory is located near the city's north boundary on Upper Park Road, across from DeLaveaga

SHELTER

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Golf Course.

The proposal comes as the Homeless Services Center deals with the realities of the ongoing recession, which has donors and local governments cutting back on their financial gifts, Loisel said. Instead of busing nighttime guests to the armory, which the center pays Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District about \$50,000 each year to do, the center could pocket that money to spend on rent or improved services, Loisel said. The county,

which helps pay the \$170,000 annual bill for armory services, could save about \$14,000 in administration and other overhead costs.

The shelter would open after 6 p.m. and close about 7:30 a.m., Loisel said.

Loisel could not specify which empty warehouse is under consideration as the financial aspects have not been finalized, he said. But Woolever said the property is on Encinal Street.

Michael Bethke with Slatter Construction, which also is based in Harvey West, said he is working with Loisel to find a solution that would help save the center money and better serve the homeless without disturbing neighbors.

Bethke said he is supportive of a Harvey West nighttime shelter "if it is done in the right way," with tight control and management.

"That's kind of our main focus, on how this will be compatible with the businesses we're trying to run out here," Bethke said. "We may be supportive if indeed this is an opportunity to truly help out people so they're not sleeping out in the rain. It's a good humanitarian thing to do."

The proposal must go before the city's Planning Commission and City Council before plans can move forward. Loisel said he hopes to be ready to go before this year's rainy season.