

✓ GROWTH County planners approve 1-percent growth rate

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SANTA CRUZ — County planning commissioners Wednesday recommended to the Board of Supervisors that they adopt a 1-percent residential growth rate for 1987 and end the practice of carrying over unclaimed building permits from year to year.

Commissioners made their recommendations on a 3-2 vote following a public hearing attended only by representatives of the Resource Defense Fund, an environmental group that favors tight restraints on growth.

Voting in the minority were commissioners Dale Skillicorn and Wynn Alexander, the appointees of Fourth

District Supervisor Sherry Mehl and First District Supervisor Dan Forbus, respectively.

Supervisors must set annual limits on residential growth under Measure J, the growth-control ordinance approved overwhelmingly by county voters in 1978. Under the measure, the board has sought to control growth by limiting the number of building permits available each year. The board has also specified how many permits are to be issued in the county's urban and rural areas, and how many of those must be reserved for low- and moderate-income housing.

For the last two years, the board has set the residential growth rate for the county's unincorporated

areas at 1.5 percent. Last fall, the county planning staff recommended a 1-percent rate for 1987, following a study of Measure J's economic and environmental effects. Planners said the lower rate was needed to control growth because average household size has been increasing.

Under the planners' recommendation, which was endorsed by the Planning Commission, the county would be authorized to issue up to 468 new building permits this year.

The staff recommended that those new permits be added to the surplus of 1,468 permits authorized for previous years, but never claimed.

Commissioners rejected that recommendation Wednesday. The commission majority recommended in-

stead that only unclaimed permits for low- and moderate-income housing be carried over into 1987. Under Measure J, at least 15 percent of all permits issued must be reserved for low- and moderate-income housing.

Planning staffer Tom Burns estimated there are 200 such surplus permits on the department's books now.

Elimination of the practice of carrying over surplus permits — except for those earmarked for low- and moderate-income housing — was one of the recommendations contained in the Measure J environmental study. Burns told the commission Wednesday, however, that the County Counsel's Office had advised that it would be unwise for the county to discontinue the practice now.

Burns said if the surplus permit authorizations were wiped out, it would be difficult for the county to meet its "fair share" of 10-year regional housing goals set in 1980 by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments.

The county's progress toward meeting those goals was an issue in a legal challenge to Measure J mounted by the Santa Cruz County Builders Exchange, which contended that Measure J growth controls were forcing people of modest means out of the county's housing market. The Builders Exchange last month lost its bid to overturn the county's growth management ordinance and the 1986 growth rate.

Ruling in the county's favor, Su-

perior Court Judge Chris Cottle cited the surplus of unclaimed building permits as evidence that Measure J could not be restricting growth to the point that buyers and renters of low- and moderate-income were unable to find housing.

The county is seeking state approval of a General Plan amendment reducing its fair-share housing goal.

Burns said Wednesday that the County Counsel's Office had indicated it would be "inappropriate" to eliminate the building-permit carryover practice at a time when the county is trying to scale back its housing goals.

He said, however, that the carryover practice might be ended next year, after those issues are resolved.