

Beach Hill hostel gets nod from city

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Hostel Society Tuesday won its battle to convert a group of quaint old cottages on Beach Hill into overnight lodging for world travelers.

On a 4-3 vote, the City Council gave the Hostel Society permission to operate Carmelita Cottages as a hostel for travelers who arrive by bicycle, on foot or public transportation.

The hostel is to open in the late afternoon and close in the early morning. During the day, when the hostel is closed, the grounds will be open for use as a city park.

Tuesday's vote ended a long dispute about what should be done about the cottages, built in the 1860s and believed to contain the oldest building on Beach Hill.

The property was given to the city 30 years ago by the late Lottie Sly.

But the gift did not come without strings attached. In her handwritten will, signed in 1953, Sly stipulated the property was to be used "for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a public park" and "for the area to be cleared and properly landscaped, making it a restful place for the public to enjoy."

Since that time — as the cottages became more run down — there have been so many arguments about the use of the property, the gift was beginning to look like a white elephant.

Sly gave Stanford University control of the will and there was always the possibility Stanford would develop the property in its own way, if city officials could reach no decision.

Several years ago, the cottages were going to be torn down, but historical buffs managed to win landmark status for the garden cottages.

The council vote was not split in the usual way — three conservatives on one side and four liberals on the other.

Instead, two conservatives, Arnold Levine and Katy Sears-Williams, sided with two liberals, Michael Rotkin and Jane Weed, to give the hostel society the majority vote it needed for approval of the \$300,000 project.

Liberals Mardi Wormhoudt and John Laird teamed with conservative Spiro Mellis to cast the minority vote. They sided with Beach Hill residents opposed

to the hostel.

Mellis had previously indicated he would support the hostel, but when it came time for him to cast his vote, he changed his mind. He told a reporter later that he did not think Sly had a hostel in mind when she deeded the property for a park.

Sears-Williams had originally been against the hostel, but said she had changed her mind after talking with hostel supporters who "impressed" her.

The council decided to hold a public hearing later on conditions for the design of the hostel and park. They voted to require the Hostel Society to maintain its membership in the national and international Hostel Society, for as long as the Carmelita Cottages hostel is in operation.

In making its decision, the council overturned a 3-2 decision by the Zoning Board to deny the hostel permit. The board majority had said there was enough neighborhood opposition to withhold the permit.

There was no consensus among Beach Hill residents on the issue.

Hundreds of signatures on petitions were submitted to the council, both for and against the hostel.

"The petitions show the neighborhood is split, almost down the middle," commented Laird.

A vote for the hostel, said Wormhoudt, would contradict zoning and General Plan laws designed to protect the neighborhood from "further commercial intrusion."

But Levine said he was convinced the Hostel Society "will do a good job" and keep the property in good shape.

The Hostel Society proposes to hire supervisors for the hostel and a property manager.

The project will contain 45 beds and will be built in two phases over a 10-year period. It will be financed partially through a grant from the state Coastal Conservancy.

A listing in hostel handbooks, distributed internationally, will tell hostellers there is no car parking available and arrival must be by foot, bicycle or bus, according to the proposal.

"We want you to let us spend \$300,000 to save that property," Hostel Society representative Jane Wade told the council.

The council's decision ends a search by the Hostel Society to secure a permanent hostel site.