

Bridge Study Unpopular

Beach Flat Residents Say Area Is Unhealthy

By BILL NEUBAUER

Sentinel Staff Writer

Residents of the beach flats in Santa Cruz Monday night expressed concern over unhealthy conditions. They complained about rats that run in the streets, about the trash and garbage that is dumped virtually everywhere except into containers.

They also voiced concern over the men who urinate against the sides of the buildings rather than walk to available restrooms nearby, about the children who have but one tree to look at and no place to play, about the dream of a neighborhood park with a complete inventory of facilities except a sandbox — “we have too many cats around here.”

Where is the beach flats?

The beach flats is a pocket of urban decay in the city of Santa Cruz, bounded by Riverside Avenue, Second Street, Beach Street, the mouth of the San Lorenzo River and the Beach-Boardwalk amusement park.

And those who were doing the talking to Santa Cruz officials Monday night were the men and women who call this area home and who are girding themselves to wage even an initiative election (if need be) to prevent the city from building a bridge from the foot of Ocean Street to Second Street so that hordes of tourists intent upon play may patronize the amusement park, the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf and other attractions here which they, themselves, can't afford.

“Our kids are forever standing with their noses pressed against a bakery shop window,” said Francine Adkins Monday at a meeting of the Beach Flats Neighbors with Peter Katzlberger, Santa Cruz planner, and Larry Pearson of the planning staff.

“What I mean is, we can't afford to send the kids to the amusement park, where everybody else has such a good time. The kids can't swim in the river because that is polluted. They can't go to the ocean because for many that's too rough—about 55 of our kids here are under five years old and they have nothing. We have about 150 kids here and it is so sad. They walk around these little, dirty streets and they even see the half-used swimming pools at the motels but they themselves have nothing.”

But this is home, said Eileen Smith firmly, and the residents don't want to have their decrepit little houses torn down to make way for the bridge.

The bridge is another word for “enemy.” The members of the citizens group, chaired by Tony Souza, note with fear that recent talk about improving this area's livability by means of federal funds has focused the city's attention on a plan dating back to 1964 to ease traffic problems by building the bridge into Second Street.

Over and over again, Souza and others asked Katzlberger and Pearson: “Who wants this bridge? Will you tell us who is pushing for this bridge?”

Katzlberger could only answer: “It is in the 1964 general plan. It is also in the revised general plan that was approved recently by the Planning Commission and is being studied by the City Council.”

The City Council today is scheduled to authorize a study to determine the feasibility of

the bridge, and it was noted by Souza that a participant in the study will be a person who participated in a similar study for the Beach-Boardwalk some years ago. This is unfair, it was said.

Katzlberger noted that the study could settle once and for all whether the bridge should remain in the general plan or be dropped out of it.

And Pearson said:

“If the bridge doesn't cost a lot of money and will solve the traffic flow problem, that would be one thing. But if it would cost \$20 million and not do very much, that would be something else.”

Pearson agreed that if the bridge is built there would be some 14 properties, 38 houses, 56 persons affected.

A resident asked: “Where are we going to go?”

And Souza asked anew: “Who's selling the bridge?”

Katzlberger and Pearson drew plaudits from many attendees after the meeting because of their willingness to come here to the beach flats to discuss problems and to help plan future neighborhood improvements.

Improvements are coming, Katzlberger said, in conformance with a City Council action last year that designated this area a “target area” for many improvements through the federal Housing and Community Development Act. Once the plan is completed, Katzlberger said, the city will put in around \$225,000 in each of the next three years to make the life quality here much better.

Case in point: Pearson Monday night asked the group where it would like a neighborhood park placed if the people here can have their dream granted. He showed on a map a number of vacant parcels that could be purchased by the city. Most popular location was on southeast corner of Leibrandt Avenue and Raymond Street.

But nothing definite was decided on this. Katzlberger and Pearson made an offer, quickly accepted, to meet weekly with the group.

Adkins also paid tribute to City Councilmen Spiro Mellis, Larry Edler, Bruce Van Allen and Michael Rotkin for coming to the beach flats to see the problems with their own eyes, and she added: “Mayor John Mahaney just got back from a trip and one of the first things he did was telephone us of his concern. Only Councilman Joe Ghio wouldn't come here, saying he was too busy.”

Adkins also paid tribute to the public works staff for coming to the area and promising action on the rats, more containers for trash and garbage and some street improvements.

In a recent position paper given to the press the Beach Flats Neighbors blasted municipal officials for allowing this area to become “the forgotten inner city of Santa Cruz” and for thinking of it as “the Boardwalk area — an emphasis which createa a tourism bias within the minds of city officials which causes city government to ignore the very existence and conditions of the beach flats residents and myopically focuses city planners upon concepts of tourist-oriented developments and services.”

Beach flat area residents plan to attend today's Santa Cruz City Council evening session to protest the bridge study.