

Low-cost emergency care center proposal has run into a snag

A doctor's plan for an "urgent medical care center" that he says will cut drop-in medical costs by 50 percent has run into a snag.

The doctor, Robert Morris, wants to locate the center at a vacated service station at 615 Ocean St., and the fire inspector says the now-empty gas tanks have to be removed.

The station is owned by Santa Cruz attorney Joe Ritchey and he says it will cost \$30,000 to remove the tanks.

Also, the property will be worth less if the tanks are removed and the station has to revert to its former use.

Fire Division Chief George Lopes told Ritchey, "The medical clinic does not require three 10,000 gallons and one 280 gallon underground flammable liquid storage tanks" and they have to be removed if Ritchey signs a lease for the clinic.

Ritchey protested the fireman's decision at Tuesday's council meeting.

The attorney said the fire department has the authority to give him a variance and that his lease is for a good cause.

Ritchey says he's cut the rent by 45 percent to help the doctor put in the clinic.

Morris says it's costing him \$50,000.

He says a hospital emergency room charges \$120 for a

four-suture cut and that he will charge \$60; an ankle sprain costs \$155 at a hospital, \$60 at his clinic and treatment for bronchitis is \$140 at a hospital and \$55 from him.

Morris said he was the medical director in the emergency rooms of local hospitals from 1977 to 1981.

"During my directorship of such services, I came to realize I could provide most all services emergency rooms are called upon to provide at a greatly reduced price," Morris wrote to the council.

He said he's "also, to a yet unknown magnitude, encountering what appears to be a resistance from some persons in the providing of these services in Santa Cruz."

Mayor Michael Rotkin said he brought the issue of the underground tanks directly to the council because he's interested in the center and its promise of cutting medical costs.

However, Councilman Joseph Ghio said the proper process was for Ritchey to formally appeal and follow normal city guidelines rather than taking the matter straight to the City Council.

The council went along with Ghio's opinion.