

Board wrangles over cheap housing

By BUD O'BRIEN

Supervisor Dan Forbus, who has been complaining for several years that most of the so-called "affordable housing" in Santa Cruz County is being built in Live Oak, said last week's supervisors meeting he's going to do something about it.

Specifically, said Forbus, he's going to help mobilize public opinion in favor of amending the county's growth management law (Measure J) so that spreading affordable housing throughout the unincorporated areas of the county is made

mandatory.

While it is current policy under Measure J not to concentrate affordable housing in particular areas, but rather to "integrate" it into even affluent areas, Forbus maintains that policy is being flouted.

The subject, a sore one with Forbus and his Live Oak constituents, came up again last week while the Board of Supervisors was considering a new condominium development in the Live Oak area. The development, called "Eastbrook," is planned for a one-acre site on Capitola Road

near Jose Road.

What the board was considering was a request by the developer — Rufener Construction Co. — to increase the allowed number of units from 14 to 20. But the developer made it clear that, in order to appease some of the neighborhood opposition to the project, he would be willing to settle for 17 units, provided the proportion of affordable units could be held to 15 percent (3) rather than the 25 percent (4) that would be required under the "priority processing" granted to the development when it was first proposed.

But Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton, who authored Measure J and has been its most passionate supporter, said he would not yield on the 25 percent affordable figure, although he was quite willing to go along with the lower density of 17 units.

To Forbus, however, the situation, even though it involved few actual affordable units, represented one more effort by the "liberal majority" of the board to cram all the affordable housing possible into the Live Oak area.

"I think three (affordable) units are too much," he said, "but I could support it." He said he could do so because the neighbors, the developer and the planning staff had all agreed to that solution.

Forbus said that more than 70 percent of all the affordable housing that had been built in the county since the passage of Measure J (which requires that at least 15 percent of all new housing be in the affordable category) had been placed in Live Oak. He didn't come right out and say so, but his implication was

plain that the other supervisors were catering to the desires of their constituents that "low income" housing not be built in their more fancy neighborhoods.

His fellow conservative, Watsonville's E. Wayne Moore Jr., was more blunt on that score. Moore, who has long opposed the affordable housing provisions of Measure J, said he would enthusiastically support any move that would result in spreading affordable housing around geographically.

Introducing such housing into more neighborhoods, he said, "would do more to repeal Measure J than anything I can think of." Moore said that in his opinion "you don't thrust into neighborhoods houses that don't belong there."

If such a policy were actually to be put into effect, Moore said, "then the entire county will know what the people of Live Oak already know."

Patton snapped that Moore appeared to be suggesting that housing in this county be available only to the rich, a

position, he said, "I categorically reject."

The people in Live Oak will be more than receptive to any suggestions Forbus might make in the matter, Carl Johns, president of the Live Oak Community Assn., said.

Johns said Forbus and his group will meet before the month is out to plan a strategy to prevent the "liberal board majority" from treating Live Oak like a dumping ground.

Johns said the people in Live Oak don't oppose affordable housing, and in fact most of them are just average working people, but they're tired of seeing their neighborhoods filled up with development after development, while the more posh neighborhoods of other areas are exempt from such intrusions.

He said the liberal majority's decision to force the developer of the Eastbrook development to provide 25 percent affordable housing, although it allowed him the option of 17 or 20 units, was an example of such an attitude. He said it ignored the wishes of the people.

REFERENCE