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X EQ - 1989 - Watsonville - Rebuilding

# Housing still tops the agenda for Watsonville City Council

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11-8-89

Watsonville has a housing shortage, but there's no shortage of opinions on how the city should deal with the situation.

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For more than an hour last night, the City Council took public testimony and heard everything from a proposed moratorium on real-estate sales to

complaints about the placement of temporary housing for those made homeless by the 7.1 earthquake on Oct. 17.

The council, which discussed several aspects of the housing situation, formed a three-member council committee to work on long-term housing issues. The members are Rex Clark, Dennis Osmer and Vido Deretich, all of whom will not be on the council after the Dec. 5 election.

Many of those who addressed

the council had been at a meeting earlier yesterday of the Watsonville Citizens Interim Housing Advisory Board, which has been meeting regularly since the earthquake.

Kathy Bernard, acting chairwoman of the group, urged the council to impose an 18-month moratorium on rent increases, a six-month moratorium on real-estate sales, and a rule giving tenants of quake-damaged rental

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## HOUSING

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property the first crack at re-renting when their places are ready for occupancy again.

Osmer said the council committee would consider the concerns of the advisory board.

Joe Fahey urged the council to adopt an overall plan for dealing with housing and to seek donations of labor and materials for building new housing and fixing what can be repaired. There are church groups, he said, such as the Mennonites, that are experienced in putting up housing in a short time. Fahey is president of Teamsters Local 912, Watsonville, but did not identify himself as representing the union.

"The city can ask the banks not to foreclose" on people whose properties were damaged by the earthquake, Fahey said, urging the city to adopt a policy that all real-estate transactions be reviewed by the city.

Councilman Tony Campos said several local financial institutions have already given a grace period to those affected by the quake.

The council also heard complaints from representatives of Independence Square that 40 mobile homes to house the homeless will be placed next to their apartment complex. Independence Square, on Madison Street, is for the elderly and the handicapped some of whom are in wheelchairs.

Former Watsonville Mayor Bill Johnston, who represents the management agents of Independence Square, said the placement of the mobile homes raises questions about traffic, parking and where the children living in the mobile units will play. He expressed concern about the traffic for the wheelchair-bound, who now ride their chairs on the lightly-traveled stretch of Madison that leads to Independence Square. His concerns were echoed by two people who live near Independence Square.

The mobile homes are coming from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and it was a countywide committee that decided yesterday to place them on the county land next to Independence Square. FEMA's policy is to place the units for a maximum of 18 months.

The city's answer to those concerned about Independence Square was that finding housing for the homeless is more important than the inconvenience of others.

"We're trying to recognize the population that has been displaced," Planning Director Maureen Owens said.

Osmer said, "The problem is understanding that people lost all their belongings" and their homes in the quake, and are now living in shelters, or the tent cities at Ramsay and Callaghan parks.

Oscar Rios, a candidate for City Council in District 2, the Down-

town, said he shared the feelings of the Independence Square people, but said getting people out of the tents is a priority.

Maria Gonzales, who came to the meeting with her two small children, said she's had to take her children to the doctor three times because of the cold, damp conditions in her tent.

City Manager John Radin said 369 people are staying in shelters in the city, including the tents at Ramsay Park. The figure doesn't include between 100 and 150 people in the "unofficial" tent city at Callaghan Park.

Maria Corralejo said that if housing isn't provided for the farm workers and laborers, they'll go to Mexico and the city will face a labor shortage.

After several people in the audience mentioned the possibility of rent control, Deretich said such control should be considered "if we have reports of extensive gouging."

Campos said that if the city "puts a lot of restrictions on, you'll end up with people bucking the system." He urged landlords and tenants to work together to keep rents down.

At the request of Councilman Joe Marsano, the council agreed to reconsider its decision to charge building-permit fees for reconstruction of quake-damaged buildings at next Tuesday's council meeting.

Last week, the council voted to charge fees for construction valued at more than \$25,000.