

✓^{Health} Emeline complex plans advance

Lawsuit threatened

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SANTA CRUZ — Despite a grand jury probe and a last-ditch effort to put it on hold, county officials Tuesday advanced plans to build a controversial \$22 million health services building.

An effort to scuttle the design for a three-story building and replace it with a smaller one more palatable to neighbors failed.

Instead, the Board of Supervisors voted 3-2, with supervisors Jan Beautz and Fred Keeley opposed, to proceed with plans for a new office building at the county's Emeline Street complex.

Reaction among neighbors who oppose the building plans was swift.

"We will bring a suit," said Gloria Cofangelo, president of Friends of Emeline Street, known as FOES, following the decision. "Our guess is the (Santa Cruz) planning commission won't be able to recommend approval to the board. If they do, we certainly will file a suit," she said.

The proposed building, designed to relieve office overcrowding, has been plagued by problems including neighborhood opposition, design dilemmas, financing difficulties and charges from neighbors that the county has failed to follow its own planning rules.

Members of the county grand jury also are investigating the building, reportedly as part of a probe into county bond financing practices.

Those interviewed by jurors, including at least two supervisors, said that among the issues investigated were representations the county made in purchasing the land in 1988 and claims made to the state in obtaining financing.

"We welcome the grand jury to have a chance to see how we do our financing," said Elinor Hall, Health Services Agency administrator. "I think it will stand up just fine to any level of scrutiny they put it under."

Supervisors Tuesday were mum regarding the grand jury's confidential examination of whether the building's financial foundation is sound.

But they did wrangle politically

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Emeline Street complex

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before deciding to proceed. In the process, they granted some concessions to the neighbors to address parking, fencing and traffic problems.

Supervisors Beautz and Keeley tried to scuttle the three-story, 70,000-square-foot design and the location near a eucalyptus grove.

In the interest of being a "good neighbor," the two suggested that a warehouse on another part on the Emeline Street property be demolished, and replaced with a two-story, 49,000-square-foot design.

They also suggested that county offices in the area not related to health care, such as volunteer and parks and child care offices, be relocated.

A two-story building at the site of the warehouse would blend more with the surrounding residential neighborhood and could be built closer to the other county buildings at the Emeline complex, said Keeley.

In a bid to win Watsonville Supervisor Ray Belgard's support, Beautz and Keeley suggested that by building a smaller health services building, the county could afford to expand health care or Mu-

nicipal Court space in Watsonville, as well.

Beautz maintained that the board has previously "stood for good environmental planning and neighborhood protection."

"It's not right when it's our own facility that these issues are not dealt with," said Beautz.

The county should prepare a master plan for the entire Emeline Street complex before building, she said. "We're doing this backward. I would prefer to see us halt and really think about what we're doing."

Those arguments failed to convince the board majority and County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello.

Mauriello recommended the board proceed and try to speed up the process to take advantage of a advantageous bidding climate. To redesign and change the location would cost about \$700,000 and a year's time in environmental assessment studies, she said.

Supervisor Gary Patton questioned where the warehouse could be moved and at what cost.

Supervisor Robley Levy argued that to change course on the building size and location without ac-

companying studies would be "imprudent."

Belgard rejected the political carrot offered by Beautz and Keeley to expand health or court facilities in Watsonville. Existing leased space is adequate for the short-term, and long-term plans should be done in conjunction with Watsonville city officials, said Belgard.

"We're at a point now where I think we need to go on," Belgard said of the proposed building. "The need is now."

The board majority agreed to include several points made by Keeley and Beautz. Among them, the county will initiate a permit parking program for neighborhood streets, much like one in Live Oak near the beaches.

They agreed, too, to work with Santa Cruz city officials to help residents win approval to fence properties on Lee Street.

Residents maintained that city restrictions on fences would make it difficult for them to keep people who use services at Emeline Street from camping along the creek and in their backyards.