

# Housing Granny unit' regulations loosened by City Council

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council Tuesday loosened restrictions on building of "granny" units in backyards.

The council agreed to allow construction of a limited number of detached units to be occupied by the older relatives of the homeowner or by needy senior citizens.

The council also agreed to allow additions up to 500-square-feet to owner-occupied houses for granny units. This loosens provisions of an existing ordinance that allowed homeowners to divide their homes into apartments for mothers, mothers-in-law or other relatives, but did not allow additions attached to the house.

The council had passed a strict granny unit ordinance one year ago, following passage of SB 1543 authored by state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville. That bill ordered local governments to draft a granny-unit ordinance, determine whether one were needed or accept state rules.

The state rules allowed detached units.

Under the city's strict ordinance, no one has applied for a permit.

On a 4-3 vote, council members agreed to amend the existing ordinance and the Local Coastal Plan.

Council members Spiro Mellis, Arnold Levine and Katy Sears-Williams dissented.

"What happens when granny dies? You've got yourself an empty house that you're going to rent out. It's not good planning," said Mellis.

The amended ordinance requires the homeowner to obtain a special use permit from the Zoning Board.

Construction is limited to 25 units citywide per year and five units per census tract.

Builders must meet parking and design requirements.

If units are rented, tenants must be low- or moderate-income senior citizens, with rents controlled by the council to keep them low-priced.

Vacancies are supposed to be filled by renting to other eligible elderly tenants.

Resident Jim Franks, who keeps a consumer watch on illegal housing in the city, was opposed to the liberalized ordinance. "You can't enforce the illegal units you have now, yet you want to add to them," Franks told the council.