

# Council Vote Dooms Zoning For Highrise

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Sentinel Staff Writer

A sharp cutdown of allowable building heights in the City of Santa Cruz was ordered Tuesday night by the city council.

Through 6 to 1 adoption of a resolution of intention to make changes in the zoning ordinance, the council specifically directed the city planning commission to eliminate highrise districts throughout the city and to replace them with mediumrise districts.

The action climaxed a year of bitter controversy and political conflict over whether there is a place in the city for buildings taller than about 70 feet.

But the action may precipitate a new battle, this one in the courts, the council was warned by Brad Macdonald, director of community affairs for the Santa Cruz Board of Realtors.

Macdonald asserted before the council vote that the state's Environmental Quality Act requires an analysis in the form of an environmental impact report on any action by a governmental entity which "will cause any change or potential change in the environmental, social or economical circumstances of the area."

Macdonald contended further that "any time the governmental entity is contemplating making such a change it is required to submit an environmental impact report fully informing the public of both the short and long term effects of such changes."

Also, he said, these changes required approval of the Central Coast Regional Commission.

Then Macdonald said:

"Should the city council choose to present the proposed

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drastic revisions in the zoning ordinance without regard to a cost benefit study and without filing a proper environmental impact report, the Santa Cruz Board of Realtors will consider it a duty not only to its members but to the community as a whole, to seek a ruling from the court that mandates an environmental impact report and approval of the coast commission prior to the time any of these revisions are made."

Macdonald said that the council's resolution to make zone changes "is the same package, with a little different ribbon," that the council rejected Aug. 14 with a 3 to 3 vote.

The council resolution also directs the planning commissioners to initiate changes in general regulations affecting residential districts, particularly with respect to height and density, and to take special steps to correct any so-called problem areas regarding general regulations for residential districts.

But the council left vague the guidelines the planning commissioners will operate under until these zoning text changes are made. While the city's interim zoning ordinance specifies criteria by which new developments must be judged, it does not set forth density strictures.

Thus the commissioners are free to use a broad range of standards, which was not the case under the zone changes rejected by the council Aug. 14.

Councilman Bert Muhly replied to Macdonald's warning of a possible court action: "I am

sure the California Environmental Quality Act does not negate our emergency power to act in the interest of the general health and welfare."

Council member Virginia Sharp concurred.

Councilman Sally DiGirolamo expressed considerable unhappiness with the resolution, asser-

ting the R-H districts should be downzoned to a single family designation. But she did not join Ernest Wicklund in his vote of dissent.

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