

# Homeless-teen shelter draws residents' criticism

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SANTA CRUZ — Neighbors of a proposed homeless shelter for teens raised a hue and cry at the county building Friday when Above the Line director Kimberly Carter applied for a permit to operate the Corralitos facility.

Fears about increased crime, inadequate staffing, insufficient sewage facilities, noise and traffic were voiced by about a dozen residents and landowners in the Corralitos neighborhood.

"They say it's going to work, but it's not," said neighbor Theresa Moreno, who lives on Freedom Boulevard, a few doors down

from the proposed facility. "If the kids want to make a quick getaway, they're going to do it. They'll get out, they'll break into houses, they'll rob cars and get into accidents."

Zoning administrator Don Bussey postponed a decision on the matter until he can resolve several questions raised by the residents, and will call another hearing sometime after April 17.

Two neighboring residents sent in letters of support, and county officials, from a sheriff's deputy to the director of adult education, spoke out in favor of the facility, as did several other county residents. The

*Please see SHELTER — BACK PAGE.*

## Shelter discussed

*Continued from Page A1*

Corralitos Women's Club has also expressed its support of the facility.

Worries about increased crime are unfounded, said Rachel Weinstein, who runs a homeless teen shelter in San Jose.

"The fear is that there's going to be theft, vandalism and drug use; but so much of what they're talking about is survival activities," Weinstein said. "They steal things in order to eat; they sell their bodies for a place to spend the night; they use drugs to numb the pain. If you take away the necessity for those behaviors, you take away the behaviors."

Rita Moreno, who also lives on Freedom Boulevard, predicted the youngsters at the facility would have "neurological impairments" that would preclude rehabilitation. "They have violent criminal behavioral problems that are not going to go away with any amount of counseling," said Moreno, who identified herself as a certificated behavioral specialist.

Bussey took issue with Moreno, challenging her credentials and saying he has a son with a neurological disorder. "I don't want to argue with you, but you're way off base," he told her.

Weinstein also challenged Moreno. "I have a master's degree in psychology, and I can tell you there's a difference between someone with a neurological disorder and a homeless youth. It's not an appropriate facility for that type of youth, and they won't be allowed into the program."

Carter emphasized that only teens who had demonstrated a commitment to turning their lives around would be allowed into the

program, and that youngsters with a violent criminal history would be dealt with by Juvenile Hall — not Above the Line.

"We're not interested in betraying the confidence of the community, but these are troubled kids saying, 'I'm ready and willing to make changes in my life,'" said Carter. "These are programs that have been proven to work."

Carter said she looks forward to working together with neighbors to make the program a success, including placing several neighbors on the group's board of directors.

"I don't think I could live with myself if I tried to impose something that wouldn't turn these kids' lives around without doing it at the expense of the community," Carter said.

Local landowner Patricia Holley raised concerns about the increased noise from a bus turnout that the county requested be placed in front of the facility. The hydraulic brakes from the buses turning around would make much more noise than that of a regular bus stop, she argued. She was distressed that the guidelines allow outdoor activities until 10 at night. "That's going to affect the peace of the neighborhood," she said. She also took issue with a plan to allow up to 16 pets at the facility.

"Why are they providing animals to these children?" Holley asked. "I thought they were homeless; I thought they didn't have money. ... If this has to be a low-income facility, maybe they should consider elderly people who have contributed to society and deserve to live out their years in peace."

The facility was built using federal money that stipulated it must be used as a low-income housing

project.

Roy Nagamine, who also lives on Freedom Boulevard, turned in a petition with 100 signatures opposing the facility. Nagamine was concerned that the shelter would disrupt the neighborhood and hurt the property values.

"When something doesn't go right, we're the ones to suffer the consequences; that's unavoidable," he said. "Why not take them to Fort Ord? There's plenty of housing there."

Resident Jo Ellen Petery vowed to battle the facility to the end. "We will fight forever to keep this project out of our neighborhood."

Namvar Dinyari, the homebuilder who purchased the property in 1988, described its condition when he found it. It was a dilapidated collection of ramshackle structures strewn with trash and abandoned cars, with utility cords running to each car to power the light bulbs and heaters that homeless people used to stay warm at night.

Dinyari has spent well over \$1 million refurbishing the former labor camp and has been carrying the project for four years, first looking for the right tenant, and then waiting for Carter's group to raise the funds. Dinyari, a Bahai who fled persecution in his native Iran, said he wanted to create a shelter for low-income people as a way to pay back the country that took him and his family in his time of need.

"I have paid my dues to bring this place to the condition it is in now," he said. "From this point on I have no problem to say I am American, and I want to join with the neighbors to work together to make this project work."