

Aptos coast hearing draws a big crowd

By BUD O'BRIEN

Close to 175 people showed up at Rio del Mar school Thursday night for a briefing on the development of a land use plan for the beach areas of Santa Cruz County.

There was obviously great concern among Rio del Mar and Seascape area residents over the plan, which is being developed under the terms of the state Coastal Act of 1978, which is in turn implementing legislation for Prop. 20, the coastal protection initiative approved by state voters in 1972.

Discussed Thursday night was that part of the plan (called the Local Coastal Plan or LCP) having to do with public access to the beach and with providing "visitor serving facilities."

Genette Sonnesyn, a member of the county planning staff who is in charge of developing the LCP, explained to the audience that although the land use plans for the coast are developed locally, they have to hew to the guidelines laid down by state law. Those guidelines, she said, mandate that "maximum public access" to the beaches must be provided consistent with private property rights and environmental concerns. She said the guidelines also say that areas along the coastline must be set aside for "visitor facilities"—i.e., hotels-motels, vacation rentals, restaurants, campgrounds, recreational vehicle parks, parking facilities, etc. — and that a portion of those facilities must be affordable to moderate income groups.

Ms. Sonnesyn said that the tentative proposals unveiled Thursday night are subject to public review and suggestions

and are by no means final. Before any LCP is approved, it must go through the county planning bodies and Board of Supervisors, the Regional Coastal Commission and state Coastal Commission, she said.

Another planning staffer, Pat McCormick, said that an on-the-spot survey had disclosed that there are at least 550 "access trails" of one kind or another leading to beaches in Santa Cruz County from Waddell Creek on the San Mateo County border to the Pajaro River. Of that number, he said 296 of

them lead to beaches from New Brighton State Beach south.

McCormick said it was the planning staff's belief that such a large number of access trails were not needed, so that the adoption of the LCP could actually mean fewer access points to the beaches. The aim, he said, would be to so arrange the access points that usage of the beaches would be spread along the coastline.

The planners had selected seven so-called "key sites" where development of visitors service facilities would go. These included the Porter-Sesnon property, the McGregor Drive-State Park Drive area in Seacliff, the whole of the "bluff area" in Aptos Seascape downcoast from Dolphin Drive, and the so-called Dennis Property, a 13-acre parcel lying just above Deer Park shopping center on Rio del Mar Boulevard.

The people who live in the Seascape and Dennis Property areas were obviously disturbed by those designations, but Ms. Sonnesyn noted that state law gives priority in the coastal area to visitor service facilities except in cases where there is an agricultural designation.

Most of the questions from the audience reflected the concern of the residents that their residential area would be inundated with out-of-county visitors, with the resultant traffic jams, littering problems and general deterioration in the residential quality of the area.

Ms. Sonnesyn assured the people that their concerns would be transmitted to the proper agencies and such input would be given weight by the decision-makers.

"What we need from you," she said to the audience at one point, "is the kinds of things you think would fit in." Which brought a retort from the audience that probably reflected the majority view:

"How about Brussels sprouts?"

There were also plenty of questions about who was going to pay for all the things that seemed to be called for by the state law, to which there were virtually no answers.

Ms. Sonnesyn assured the people as the meeting drew to a close that the hearing process had only just begun, and many of the people indicated they were prepared to do everything in their power to preserve what they perceive to be the amenities of their area.