

Emergency housing site may be ready in two weeks

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SANTA CRUZ — An emergency mobile home park for earthquake victims in Watsonville is under construction and could be ready in two or three weeks, even though local governments are still negotiating finances and other conditions with state and federal agencies, a housing official said.

"The priority we have is, no matter what negotiations we have, construction (of the emergency mobile home park) has to continue," said Luther Perry, who leads the county-wide task force on post-disaster housing.

Watsonville city officials were reassured Wednesday that the city will be reimbursed for installing water and sewer services on the land, which is owned by the county and located behind the south county courthouse on Freedom Boulevard.

City Manager John Radin on Tuesday had told the City Council that he feared the city would have to pick up the \$100,000 tab for the services.

But Radin said Wednesday that he had received assurances that the state Department of Commerce

would reimburse the city out of a \$2 million fund for housing created by the state Legislature during their Nov. 2-4 special session on earthquake relief. "We will do the work, then apply (for aid)," Radin said.

County government also is grappling with state and federal emergency agencies over who will pay for a number of services and construction projects for the emergency mobile home park.

Last week, county supervisors agreed to donate the 4.5 acres of county land behind the Watsonville county courthouse for the first temporary mobile-home park for families left homeless in the Oct. 17 quake.

The park will contain about 42 of the 150 mobile homes that are being shipped to California by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The trailers are being stored at Ford Ord.

But before county supervisors would allow FEMA and the state Office of Emergency Services to set up the park, the supervisors drew up a list of requirements — including a fence around the park for the safety of children, sod for a play area, pavement or gravel surfaces for driveways and parking spaces, and full-time, live-in managers for

the park grounds.

Perry said it was "a great understatement" to say that federal and state authorities were upset with the supervisors' list of conditions.

"The real hang up is the existence of a list, even with one item on it," Perry said. "They're from Sacramento and Washington, and they know what's best for us."

For the past week, Perry said local, state and federal officials "had marathon negotiations of the most urgent sort," and have "reached a point where we could all live with it while negotiations continue."

Caltrans workers "turned ground" on the park Friday, he said, and the park could be finished in two or three weeks. Crews will work 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

The county eventually may need as many as 400 mobile homes, Perry said, and FEMA has agreed to send as many as are needed.

The county-wide housing task force is still studying where it could place other mobile-home parks, Perry said. While no site has been chosen, the list of prospects has shortened to O'Neill Ranch in Soquel, Skypark in Scotts Valley, and UC Santa Cruz.