

# ✓ **Summit rebuilding-rule streamlining begins**

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**SANTA CRUZ** — The Board of Supervisors took steps Tuesday to relax county geological guidelines for residents who want to repair or rebuild quake-damaged homes in the Summit area.

The complicated and controversial policies, enacted in the aftermath of the Oct. 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquake, have hindered efforts by many Summit residents to rebuild from the disaster, resulting in lawsuits and bad feelings between mountain dwellers and the county.

The meeting was in stark contrast to previous, raucous clashes between supervisors and Summit residents, when voices were often raised and gavels banged. Summit residents in attendance Tuesday sat quietly with their hands folded. Few addressed the board; after the meeting they

declined comment, instead preferring to wait until Oct. 8, when the draft revisions are expected to come back before the supervisors.

Board members themselves said little, save for Supervisor Jan Beautz, who along with Supervisor Fred Keeley proposed the policy changes, designed to ease, clarify and expedite the process of obtaining a county permit to repair or rebuild quake damaged homes in the Summit.

Beautz and Keeley represent the Santa Cruz County side of the mountains.

"Supervisor Keeley and I have certainly learned a lot about geology in the last two years," said Beautz.

Preliminary results from a federal study of geologic hazards in the Summit disclose little significant risk to living there. It was those findings which cleared the way for Tuesday's actions, said County Counsel Dwight Herr.

The board actions came in the form of two agenda items. One eases the provisions of a waiver holding the county harmless for damages incurred by Summit residents who rebuild. Another clears up logjams and addresses theoretical fissures in the county's actual quake permit process, which has been rife with requirements for reports before a permit would be issued.

The most significant change, approved unanimously by the board, rescinds the universal demolition powers of the controversial waiver.

In order to rebuild, Summit homeowners are required to sign a waiver absolving the county of future liability. In signing, they also acknowledge that they reside in a seismically active area. While the residents did not object to that, they filed a class-action lawsuit against another waiver provision allowing the county to, at any

time in the future, declare Summit property "unsafe to occupy" and to order its demolition.

In a separate, also unanimous action, the supervisors directed the county Planning Department and staff to draft a series of changes which:

- Develop a time line for processing geological reports, needed by most Summit residents in order to rebuild;

- Clear the lines of communication between a permit seeker, registered geologists hired to prepare reports, and the county;

- Ensure the county's geological hazards guidelines stick to matters of human safety and not "become sort of treatises on geology," said Beautz.

- Cross-reference permit applications to avoid duplication of reports. In the past, the county has sometimes required neighbors who live side-by-side to both undergo

costly geological testing.

- Eliminate confusing language in the county's geological guidelines in order to make it clear the policy goal is rebuilding structures which are safe to occupy, even in a large earthquake.

- Clarify the county's geologic policies by printing information and a list of suggestions to help applicants through the process.

In addition, Beautz asked new County Geologist Joe Hanna to report back on the "appropriateness" of the county's list of approved geological consultants. Prior to Hanna's hiring last month, the county had no official registered geologist, instead employing a cadre of outsiders. The county also provided homeowners with a list "approved" geologists, leading to charges of conflict-of-interest from Summit residents.