

Homeless-1990 Homeless camping plan OK'd

Santa Cruz to pay state parks fees in two-week test

By KAREN CLARK
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — City Council members cast aside concerns from state parks officials Tuesday and threw their support behind a trial run of a program for homeless campers at each of the county's five state-run parks.

The council's approval of the test run, which lasts from April 1 through April 14, will cost the city \$2,500.

If everything goes well, the council will be asked to fund a 31-week program designed to give as many as 60 homeless people at a time a place to camp in the state parks.

State parks officials have opposed the program, which is the brainchild of a new homeless-advocacy group called Housing Options, because rules prohibit organized groups from reserving campsites in all but a handful of areas.

"I'm actually somewhat offended by the statement this is intended to give preference to special-interest groups," said Councilwoman Celia Scott, responding to comments from a park spokesman.

Only Councilwoman Mary Beth Campbell opposed the test run, noting that the county should bow to the concerns of the group that runs the state parks.

Vice Mayor Cynthia Mathews supported the measure, but suggested a vigorous screening program to

weed out those who might cause problems for park rangers.

"I have a pretty deep streak of skepticism, but I'm willing to proceed on a two-week trial basis," said Mathews, adding that she was upset with comments from several homeless people and their advocates denouncing the proposed camping program as being a drop in the bucket. "It's clear that regardless of what we do here ... we'll continue to be insulted and criticized and what we do will never be enough."

Support of the full program could cost the city up to \$45,000, primarily to pay for staffing and maintaining a van donated by the Citizens Committee for the Homeless. Other funding would come from private donations.

Here's what is being proposed:

- Two campsites big enough for 12 people would be reserved at each of the county's five state parks (Big Basin, Cowell, New Brighton, Manresa and Sunset) through the first week in November for homeless people.

- Each participant must pay \$10 in advance per week. That amounts to \$60 of the \$116 cost of each campsite during peak season.

- Priority will be given to homeless families and people who have been using Santa Cruz shelter services for the past year.

- An independent group of 20 supporters of the summer camping program will use their personal credit cards to make reservations in the parks. They would be reimbursed by USA.

- The campers would be rotated from park to park to adhere to the state's policy limiting stays to one week during peak season (late spring and summer). In addition, no one can stay at any park for more than four weeks in any given year.

- A van supplied by the Citizens Committee for the

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Homeless would be used to shuttle participants to and from Santa Cruz.

It's this transportation portion of the program that will cost the most money, but it's also a key reason the council voted to support it.

"This is not the city of Santa Cruz dumping a problem," said Mayor Michael Rotkin.

Councilman Scott Kennedy said people who believe the city isn't doing enough to solve the problem short of ending the no-camping ordinance should "adopt" a homeless person. The city's ordinance does not preclude a tent being pitched in a back yard, nor does it prevent a church from allowing homeless people to camp in their vehicles in its parking lot.

Kennedy vowed he would talk with his family about allowing a homeless person to camp in their back yard, and would speak to officials at the church he attends.

Councilwoman Jane Yokoyama said she was upset with comments from people throughout the county who had responded negatively to news that state parks could be used for homeless people.