

# Mobile home law eased

By BUD O'BRIEN

Santa Cruz County's "rental adjustment" ordinance for mobile home parks was adjusted Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors so that rent increases in a given year cannot exceed 75 percent of the increase in the Consumer Price Index.

The board took that action on the recommendation of its Mobile Home Advisory Commission, which pointed out that the CPI takes in a number of factors (food, alcoholic beverages, medical care, etc.) which don't affect expenses of operating a mobile home park. It also noted that the CPI for this area is based on expenses in the San Francisco Bay Area, which is generally more expensive than here.

But while agreeing that allowing mobile home park owners rent increases based on the full CPI increase was unjust, the board majority refused to take away the landlords' rights to "pass through" increases in taxes and local government services to the tenants.

Mobile home park owners Gordon Copus and John Watkins urged the board to allow the owners to negotiate new agreements when new tenants come into the park. But the board majority agreed with its advisory commission that

the agreement is for the space involved and can't be abrogated simply because of a change in tenants.

Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, whose coolness toward any infringement on the prerogatives of private property owners is constant, was sympathetic toward the park owners' position. She said, for example, that it was unfair that tenants were protected by rental agreements while the value of their mobile homes (those owned by the tenants) were increasing rapidly, although she conceded that this increase was not reflected in any increase in the availability of cash to the tenant unless or until the mobilehome is sold. She said, however, that when such an owner dies the heirs stand to profit greatly from such sales, which she considered unfair to the mobile home park owner who had been limited in the rent he could charge.

Supervisor Dan Forbus, usually philosophically in tune with the conservative Mrs. Liddicoat, scoffed at her on that one.

"I don't know what the value of the coach has to do with it," he said, noting that the increase in its value, like the rapid increase in the cost of homes generally, was largely illusory so far as the homeowner was concerned since if he sells

he has to buy or otherwise find housing in the same inflated market.

Forbus, in whose Live Oak area district there are more mobile home parks than any other, said, "I'm also against rent control philosophically" but that the inflationary squeeze on fixed-income elderly citizens, who make up a large percentage of mobile home park occupants, was so severe that extraordinary measures are needed.

Pajaro Valley Supervisor E. Wayne Moore, newly-seated on the board, followed the Forbus line. "I have deep philosophical reservations about rent control... it doesn't work," he said.

Moore said his efforts would be bent toward "creating conditions for the free market to work" — specifically in encouraging the building of more mobile home parks in the county, a point also made repeatedly by Mrs. Liddicoat.

But Moore joined Forbus and liberal Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton in approving the change to the rental ordinance, which affects only those parks in the unincorporated areas of the county.

Chairman Pat Liberty joined Mrs. Liddicoat in voting against the changes and in attacking the concept of rent control, period. She

said she agreed with Mrs. Liddicoat's position that "if we're going to help them (mobile home park tenants)" it should be done through government programs, such as federal housing assistance, so that everyone could share the burden now being forced on just the mobile home park owners.

"I can't support this, Mrs. Liddicoat said. "I think it's extremely unfair and will discourage further investment in such parks."

(During the discussion Mrs. Liddicoat said she had voted against the rental ordinance when it was first passed last January. However, the vote to approve the ordinance at that time was unanimous).

The ordinance involved is not a rigid rent control ordinance. It mandates mobile home park owners to enter into an agreement with tenants that spells out terms under which rents can be increased. There are, however, no criminal penalties attached to the law so that if a particular agreement is violated, the tenant's only recourse would be through civil action. The changes in the ordinance adopted Tuesday don't take effect until Feb. 1, 1982, so that agreements now in effect can run their course.