

Supervisors shelve mobile home age rules

After being subjected to some two years of discussions, public hearings, revisions and amendments at the hands of three separate county advisory bodies, an ordinance concerning age discrimination in mobile home parks was shelved again Tuesday by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

Despite groans of dismay from the audience, the board wound up two hours of debate on the latest version of the ordinance by agreeing unanimously to do nothing at this time. The reason action was again delayed was that legislation now pending in the state legislature — and cases now being decided in the courts — could override county law. Some of the supervisors said they didn't believe it would be fair to mobile home park residents to subject them to the terms of an ordinance that might soon be superseded.

But most of the people in the audience who were mobile home

park residents urged the board to act anyway, saying that they were tired of being left in the sort of limbo that they've been in since a court decision of several years ago outlawed discrimination against children in rental housing. While that ruling didn't apply specifically to mobile home parks, there has been agitation to extend it to such housing.

What the board was considering Tuesday were several recommendations as to how the law should be written. There was agreement that there should be three categories of mobile home parks in the unincorporated areas of the county: those for families, including children; those for "adults" only with adults defined as being age 18 and over; and those for senior citizens only, with some disagreement as to whether the minimum age in such parks should be 45 or 55.

What really triggered the

calls for board action in the matter was the conversion of scores of mobile home parks in the county into parks for seniors only on the heels of the court decision in the child discrimination case. Mobile home park owners feared that the ruling might soon be applied to mobile home parks and believed they would be protected against such a possibility if they converted to senior status, allowed under state law.

This prompted an outcry from many people who were mobile home park residents. While they couldn't be evicted if they were already residents when the conversion was made, they complained that the restriction would make it much more difficult to sell their homes if they wanted to move.

There were also complaints from many people who wanted the opportunity to become residents of mobile parks, which are described as among the few

examples of affordable housing available in the county.

Three different county advisory boards — the Mobile Home Commission, the Planning Commission and the Housing Advisory Commission — studied the situation at various times and each came up with its own recommendations. Among the things they agreed on was one that would allow residents of a mobile home park to decide on whether the park should be converted to one or another of the three categories. But they couldn't agree on whether this decision should be made by a bare majority of the mobile home owner or by two-thirds of them. The Planning Commission recommended the former, while the Mobile Home Commission and the Housing Advisory Commission supported the two-thirds standards.

There were other disagreements, including when the law should take effect, whether

parks for seniors should contain specific facilities, etc.

Individual supervisors also differed on which recommendations they preferred. For example, Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus, in whose district are a majority of the mobile home parks, said he favored allowing park residents to select what category they wanted by a simple majority vote; while Supervisor Gary Patton said he would favor a two-thirds rule.

But Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, whose San Lorenzo Valley District also contains numerous mobile home parks, won the day with his argument that the board ought not to adopt any law that might be nullified

by state or court action. Cucchiara said he didn't want to see mobile home park residents "whipsawed" in such a fashion.

The rest of the supervisors went along with that, although Supervisor Patton, who at first tried to get the board to adopt an ordinance, remarked that such procrastination on the part of legislative bodies was the major reason that courts are forced to settle disputes and are then accused of making legislation.

The board did indicate that if the legislature doesn't act on one of several bills concerning mobile home parks by September, it might adopt an ordinance along the lines of those recommended.

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