

Beach Flats 'Improvement' Questioned

By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

How do you define the term "area improvement?"

Residents of the city Beach Flats area near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River don't define the term the way the Santa Cruz City Council and the city planning authorities do.

They don't think, for example, that their area would be improved by a vehicle bridge at the foot of Ocean Street that would dump thousands of vehicles weekly into their area.

So they have petitioned the City Council to impose an immediate moratorium on expenditure and allocation of all government funds in and for the Beach Flats area pending development of a plan that represents the wishes of the residents.

The petition was forwarded to the City Council, city officials and the director of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for Region 9 by Francine Adkins on behalf of the Beach Flats Neighbors Association.

With the petition came two position papers developed by the citizens group, which is chaired by Tony Souza, a Liebrandt Street resident.

In the position paper seeking the moratorium, the group charges a great disparity exists between the city's stated assurances and intent regarding the Beach Flats area and the existing facts in the case.

The paper states the city did not adequately publicize public hearings held on the Beach Flats area in connection with its application for federal Housing and Community Development funds, which are to be

used to improve the area.

"An intensive door-to-door survey conducted by the Beach Flats Neighbors Association demonstrates, that over 90 percent of the actual residents of the Beach Flats area were totally unaware of that application or the public hearings . . . and the majority of the remaining percentage became aware of HCD activity solely through the efforts of the Beach Flats Neighbors after both public hearings had occurred," the paper asserts.

The paper charges that the city, while proposing to channel government funds into developing the low and moderate income neighborhood, has hired a consultant who presented a development plan showing a proposed Ocean Street bridge "eliminating an essential part of that very same low and moderate income community; and has allocated, in fact, governmental funds to assure the feasibility of said Ocean Street Bridge; and has allocated city general funds to construct said Ocean Street Bridge in 1983."

The city is accused further of utilizing the Beach Flats area as "a token blighted area to justify the displacement and disenfranchisement of current Beach Flats area residents (many of whom are of low and moderate income and over 50 percent of whom are Spanish speaking) and to justify diverting governmental funds into the general development of tourism and selected commerce for the betterment of interests detrimental to the Beach Flats area residents."

Carole Nelson of the city planning department, who heads the HCD programs under direction of Peter Katzberger,

Santa Cruz planner, told The Sentinel Wednesday that this fiscal year the city has allocated \$25,000 for planning improvements in the Beach Flats area and another \$161,000 for land acquisition.

"The Beach Flats area has been designated a target area for improvements over a three-year period by the City Council," Nelson said. "The improvements which are planned during the current fiscal year would be carried out in fiscal 1980-81 and fiscal 1981-82 if HCD and the City Council approves. The council has indicated it will allot \$278,000 in each of those two years to carry out improvements."

Nelson said that in conformance with HCD requirements there were two public hearings last November and that it was at one of these, held in Gault Elementary School, that pleas for improvements in the Beach Flats area were received from some of its residents.

The Beach Flats area was then declared a "target area" by the City Council in conformance with HCD guidelines calling for a comprehensive plan to improve conditions for

low and moderate income neighborhoods.

This action also was taken in public, with full advertising, Nelson said.

The Beach Flats Neighbors has apparently confused some of the HCD program with the city general plan and the city capital improvement program, Nelson indicated.

An Ocean Street Bridge is called for in the general plan to be considered this autumn by the Santa Cruz City Council. Funding for this project is indicated in the city's long range capital improvement program.

However, no money has been allocated to the project because such allocations are made only in the year the project is actually undertaken.

Nelson said that the charge regarding the displacement and disenfranchisement of area residents does not consider the state and federal laws regarding such an act. "If people are moved out of their homes, relocated for an improvement

project, the city would have to pay all their costs. Such a displacement or relocation would be avoided for the simple reason that the costs of relocating

the displaced persons would be more than the total HCD grant for area improvement."

Nelson stated that nothing has yet been suggested for the area other than that it be rezoned to make certain it may remain residential.

In its other position paper the Beach Flats Neighbors calls for immediate improvement of housing, city services, social and supportive services. It asks specifically for rent subsidization where needed and building code enforcement to upgrade rental units without displacing current tenants.

Also asked are resident participation in planning and area improvement, staged development of the area without tenant displacements, government backing for cooperative ownership of residences and training, skills and language programs for current residents.

Wanted, moreover, are preferential parking privileges for residents, an Ocean Street pedestrian and bicycle bridge barred to motor vehicles, a fee-based parking structure and zoning changes for residential uses.