

Dog trainer must limit classes

Animals

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SANTA CRUZ — A Soquel dog trainer lost her battle with the county Friday, as an administrative hearing officer sided with county planners' demands that she curb the number of classes she offers at her once-rural home.



Fields

Kitty Fields learned from a reporter late Friday afternoon that hearing officer Teresa Shook had upheld a county order that she offer only five dog training class sessions per week at her Maplethorpe Lane home.

"It would have been nice if someone told me about it," Fields said, asking to have the decision faxed to her before she commented on it.

Later, she telephoned the Sentinel saying she had been called away on an emergency. She was unavailable for comment late Friday.

Fields has 90 days to appeal the decision made in a quasi-judicial process adopted by the county last year to make it easier to take action against alleged violators of zoning or building codes. The hearing is not in a court of law, but both sides present evidence, swear-

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ing in and cross-examining witnesses.

The controversy highlighted a woman who has trained thousands of local residents' dogs since she began her career more than 30 years ago. If there was one thing both sides could agree on, it was that Fields is good at what she does: training people to train their dogs.

"I think she's the Julia Child of the dog set," said neighbor Lori Giuliani at one of the hearings. Giuliani and other neighbors had petitioned the county to force Fields to cut back on the number of classes she offered.

They argued, and county planners agreed, that Fields was simply too successful. Her canine obedience classes, they said, had swamped their residential area with too many dogs, too many people and too many cars. They described days, evenings and weekends of noise, traffic, floodlights and dog waste.

Fields and her husband Donald, and other neighbors, responded that she was simply continuing the same business she had always done in an area once owned by her family before it was subdivided, sold and developed into a suburban neighborhood.

Her dog classes, Fields said, are a legal "non-conforming" use of the property: that is, a use that was legal before zoning codes changed, and is therefore permissible.

Fields produced class schedules she said dated to the 1960s showing that she had always offered 20-some classes a week, spread over five days.

Under the April 21 decision, however, Fields will have to cut back to "no more than five dog training class sessions per week," Shook said. "No more than 10 dogs may be enrolled in any class session."

Fields must teach the classes on her own property, Shook said, and cannot offer classes on other parcels — or at county-maintained parks — without getting a new permit from the county Planning Department.

Other terms include:

- The Fields must pay the county's enforcement costs (\$1,005) plus a civil penalty of \$1,500. The money was ordered to be a special assessment against the property;

- The Fields must seek a correction permit within 90 days for an illegal carport/garage.