

Santa Cruz Sentinel

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County OKs novel housing approach

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SANTA CRUZ — Affordable housing advocates are cheering a new county law that requires more affordable housing on land that's being rezoned from commercial use.



PIRIE

Says housing on former Par 3 course appears inevitable

The ordinance, approved unanimously Tuesday by the county Board of Supervisors, allows property owners in the county's unincorporated urban areas to convert non-residential land to residential if 40 percent of the housing is affordable for people with low and moderate incomes. The law was pushed by a community group advocating more affordable housing.

More than 60 county residents, mostly from Mid-County and members of a grassroots group called Communities Organized for

Relational Power in Action, gave the board a standing ovation.

"It was amazing," said COPA member Meg Campbell.

Campbell's daughter and grandchildren live with her, and they've begun looking for work and a house outside the county because they can't afford to live here anymore.

The new ordinance isn't expected to result in a wholesale conversion of business areas to residential, but will likely affect some of the county's vacant and underutilized property.

Planning Director Tom Burns said the law, which is effective immediately and will be reviewed in August, applies to a few sites in Live Oak and Aptos — notably the former Par 3 Golf Course off Highway 1 near State Park Drive.

"What's happening is that the disparity between commercial land values and residential land values is so wide now," he said. "It used to be that people wanted their land zoned commercial because it was worth more. Now that's not the case. So we get people asking us about rezoning their property."

"We figure if this is going to happen, we ought to capture some public benefit for it."

Supervisor Ellen Pirie has opposed market-rate housing on the former Par 3, which has been closed for six years, favoring a public park. Tuesday, she relented.

"The reality is that it's in private hands and not likely to become a community park," she said. "If Par 3 is rezoned for housing, I want as much affordable, moderate-income housing as possible."

Standard Pacific Homes has entered into talks with the Planning Department to develop the

former golf course as housing. But Peter Dunne, the company's representative, said the 40 percent affordability requirement would make building there more difficult.

"We're not walking away," he said. "But we have a lot of reservations about this. What it's going to result in is higher prices for the market-rate homes. We think this is bad policy."

Beverly Bryant of the Northern California branch of the Home Builders Association and local real estate agent Rose Marie McNair echoed Dunne's fears. Bryant urged the board instead to increase housing densities so market-rate houses are more affordable.

The county's median-home price hit a new high of \$637,000 in May, surpassing the median in Santa Clara County.

The 40 percent requirement in the new ordinance means that units must be affordable to families of four who earn less than \$89,520.

Of those affordable units, half of them would have to sell to people considered low-income — that is, a family of four who earns between \$59,680 and \$74,600 a year.

Homes would sell for \$250,000 or less in the affordable category.

Development on land that's zoned for housing is still required to include 15 percent at affordable rates.

Supervisor Tony Campos credited COPA for pushing the item.

COPA member Karen Korblik cited a recent National Association of Home Builders study that found that less than 8 percent of county residents can afford the median-priced home.

"This law is for the other 92 percent of the community that is facing a very real housing crisis," she said. "The open market is killing us."

Communities Organized
for
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