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## County's new housing plan may come without nasty fights

By Kurtis Alexander

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SANTA CRUZ -- The days of fighting over affordable housing may be over -- at least for the next five years.

The county Board of Supervisors signed off Tuesday on a preliminary housing plan that meets state quotas for high-density homes without rezoning any new land for housing, a sticky issue in Santa Cruz County.

Planners figure there will be enough housing built in the next five years, by way of second units and on land already dedicated to housing, that they can meet the state's latest round of mandates -- for 2014 -- without new acreage.

"I'm sure it will be welcome news for the folks who have been concerned about rezoning programs," said county Planning Director Tom Burns. "There's been this push from the state which is set up to encourage jurisdictions to do their share for housing ... but everybody feels like they already have too much traffic and too many problems and too much density."

The state's new housing mandate for the unincorporated county is 1,289 units, 60 percent

less than what the county has been required to produce over the last nine years. Each of the county's four cities have also been given new quotas, each significantly less than years past.

The smaller numbers this year reflect a lower demand for housing projected by the state as well as an agreement with neighboring Monterey County to accept more of the homes prescribed for the region.

The state establishes the quotas to make sure there is enough housing

for California's growing population.

Santa Cruz County's last housing plan, known officially as the housing element, was completed just this month after years of struggle. County attorneys had gone to court several times to try to loosen state housing demands while neighbors had long wrangled over which area should accept new development.

The 30 acres of high-density housing that were eventually zoned as part of the plan ended with a contentious decision to commit four acres in Seacliff, known as the Poor Clares property, to high-density senior housing.

"That state demand was not a good thing for Santa Cruz County nor, in my opinion, for affordable housing," said Supervisor Ellen Pirie, referencing the often combative discussions. "It was jam this down our throat and that's just not a good way to govern."

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Pirie said she's pleased the state's most recent housing mandates won't likely require additional rezoning.

The plan, however, does say the county will make efforts to provide affordable homes for local residents. The plan will be put out for public review over the next several months before it is finalized and the state rules on whether it's acceptable.

Cathy Creswell, a deputy director with the California Department of Housing and Community Development, agrees that with Santa Cruz County's recent rezonings and a smaller quota this year, the county might not have to do as much rezoning.

"It may be possible that they can identify sufficient land that's zoned appropriately to accommodate their needs," she said.

Housing advocates like COPA, or Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, say the most immediate priority for the county should be making sure homes get built on areas already set aside for housing. The state, though it requires the zoning, does not put a time line on building the homes.

"We've rezoned a number of acres," said COPA member Gus Gold, "but there still remains the task of arranging deals so they turn that land into housing."



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