

Campground Dreams in Santa Cruz

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prevented from doing so. "The need is still there," I protested, but to no avail.

Instead of dealing with this gut emergency need — for which CCH as monopoly service provider receives significant funding from the city and county — the board moved on to wrangle over book-keeping problems that have cast a shadow over the fate of Community House.

With the fate of this \$2 million project hanging in the balance, and hundreds of thousands of HUD funds at stake in a project that would serve far fewer people, a temporary campground to serve homeless people was the last thing on the minds of most board members. Yet a campground is exactly what is most needed.

In tabling the issue (unless it is reactivated in executive session), CCH has confirmed the long-time criticism that it has little or no input from homeless people themselves on which programs are needed and how they should be run.

Perhaps this was only to be expected. Key CCH board members had in the past privately rejected any discussion of either reopening the Coral Street campground, letting someone else reopen it, or even closely examining the questionable circumstances under which it was closed last year. Homeless advocates have been barred from CCH for pressing the issue. I knew it was an uphill battle to think that CCH might actually provide the camp-

ground proposal a fair hearing. But I was surprised there was no discussion pro or con, when several people had indicated to me earlier that they supported the idea.

Although there are better places for a homeless campground than Coral Street, there are no other places actually available, and that is the key point. Councilmember Celia Scott, who had personal knowledge of 12 rejected sites for a campground, warned of the difficulty of getting new permits for the Coral Street site.

While a private site for a permanent campground is being talked about in homeless activist circles, and ideas for an Eco-Village combining Community Supported Agriculture and a homeless sanctuary from the Sleeping Ban are being discussed, no direct action is being taken by any public or private agency to

open a homeless campground.

With the election over, there is no need to even provide cursory answers to the main question that surfaced repeatedly during the city council campaign: how can we arrest the homeless for sleeping at night when we allow them no legal place to sleep? Was Kennedy's "Safe Haven" plan an election eve snack? Junk food to pacify the public until his chosen candidate, Hernandez, was swiftly installed?

Until the people entrusted with providing homeless services reach beyond their fears, this campground of the mind will remain unrealized.

As for the people sleeping under houses and bridges, in cars and cardboard boxes, a legal, safe, well-managed campground can only be found in their illegal (due to the sleeping ban) dreams.