

The outpouring from the public was tremendous. The Beach Flats redevelopment plan would have launched the bulldozers on the last sizable concentration of low-cost housing left in Santa Cruz. Community opponents of the redevelopment nightmare turned out in droves at the key October meeting of the Santa Cruz City Council, outnumbering proponents many times over.

The locked-in, pro-development majority on the City Council was determined to tear down homes in Beach Flats, a largely Latino neighborhood, to make way for the Seaside Company's plan to expand the amusement park at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. [See "Bulldozing Low-Cost Housing in Beach Flats," *Street Spirit*, October, 1998.]

Rushing to act before the November election, City Hall planned this demolition of the homes of Spanish-speaking Beach Flats residents in all-English Planning Commission meetings and City Council hearings. Four councilmembers had actually announced their support of the plan before public hearings were held. As they ignored the huge public opposition to their plan, the City Council's 5-2 majority was high on its own power and convinced it was unstoppable.

But the opposition would not go away. On the evening of September 15, at the first of two planned hearings, the City Council heard the anger of the community. Councilmembers again gave pro-development city staff prime time, then cut short the public comment period (after spending an additional hour debating whether to allow a debate). Shouts of anger rang out from the floor of the Civic Auditorium at this rushed, rubber-stamp parody of the democratic process — prompting a hasty recess of the council.

At the second hearing on September 27, a long line of speakers remained, all of them against the Beach Flats redevelopment plan. So many attended that a third meeting had to be scheduled. The pro-bulldozer forces had long since run

out of speakers — who were mostly paid Boardwalk employees, Chamber of Commerce members, and, most significantly, no Beach Flats residents.

But scores of opposition speakers were left: the clerk's list had more than 150 names still waiting their turn to speak out. The new speakers underlined the critical issues: Where would the displaced, low-income residents of the Beach Flats neighborhood live? What was the real payback

for the threatened environmental damage? Why wasn't there a real fiscal analysis of how much the city would benefit for the millions it would give Seaside Company's corporate boss Charles Canfield? Why wasn't the process open and deliberate instead of closed and rushed?

Perhaps the turning point came when 13-year-old Beach Flats resident Alicia Acquistapace looked the councilmembers in the eye and scolded, "Shame on you!"

At the third public hearing on October 1 — forced on the City Council by community anger — the council retreated again, reversing its earlier decision to omit new public input. An insurgent activist faction, Friends of the Beach, mobilized Beach Flats residents, most of them Spanish-speaking, poor, and apprehensive of publicity, and held a Comida y Resta on the steps of the Civic Auditorium.

The mood had now changed. The residents, and the rest of the public, were allowed to speak. Twenty five Latino residents of Beach Flats stood up together and went to the microphone, representing 193 people (half of whom were present in the audience) who had signed a letter in English and Spanish opposing the plan in their neighborhood.

Then, on October 6, without advance warning or the courtesy of letting the public know, the five-member council majority did an apparent flip-flop. They set aside the controversial Third Street Realignment, the Boardwalk Expansion, and the Commercial Retail Expansion. The voice of the people had frightened the politicians. For the moment, the Beach Flats neighborhood has been spared the wrecking ball. Without a doubt, the City Council was reeling from the rage of a community aroused.

Months of organizing by the Beach Area Working Group, public speeches by Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom, speeches by Beach Flats residents at Santa Cruz City Hall (organized by Friends of the Beach), and election-year stumping by pro-Beach Flats council candidates had paid off.

Still, the fight has not been won. Earlier on the same day that the City Council set aside the three destructive mega-projects, it rushed through the giveaway of the Tidelands property at the mouth of the San Lorenzo River so quickly that councilmembers forgot to make a formal resolution. To circumvent the City Charter, which forbids giving away such property to private corporations, the City Council's five-member majority voted to authorize returning it to the state — which would then pass it back to Charles Canfield, CEO

and owner of the Seaside Company.

This giveaway violates the City Charter, which requires a vote by the electorate, not just redevelopment-happy renegades on the council. The financial value of the property is in the tens of millions and its ecological value (to restore the San Lorenzo River) is beyond price.

Seaside Company possession of this property sets it up to proceed immediately with the set-aside plan to expand the Beach Boardwalk, the City Council's subsequent vote to "scale back" the whole enterprise notwithstanding.

The October 6th vote that stayed the wrecking ball also promised a future public process for these dread plans. But "public process" did not specify public hearings or input from real, live Beach Flats residents. The redevelopment majority on the council could simply invite its own favored service providers, experts, and staff, and continue the rubber-stamping process once the November election is past.

The passage of the key Environmental Impact Report removed the main stumbling block for developers and reduced opportunity for future public input; now, only "initial studies" and not a new EIR would be required to proceed with destructive redevelopment.

Equally ominous was the fact that this "public process" will be hatched in the Beach Committee, the pro-redevelopment back room from which the Beach plan first emerged. The new councilmembers, elected on November 3, will determine if that committee will be controlled by the same arrogant overlords that ignored public input all along.

The October 6th vote also weakened or eliminated proposed protections, refused to allow for strong low-income housing requirements, and set the stage for some small-scale condemnation and early bulldozing by choosing the Mercy Housing condo plan instead of using the cheaper Habitat for Humanity fix-up that would retain existing housing.

The dangers are real. But the community has gained valuable time. And it has dealt the Kennedy-Rotkin-Hernandez forces on the Santa Cruz City Council a solid body blow from which they will not soon recover. Scott Kennedy and Mike Rotkin, who cleared the decks for the Beach Boardwalk bulldozing, are the same politicians who gave the homeless the bigoted Downtown Ordinances, which criminalize sitting down 10 feet from a shop, peacefully asking for spare change after dark, or setting up a political table in front of a sidewalk cafe.