

Meet the Future Homeless of Santa Cruz

from page one

housing from its rightful owners so the City can build low-cost housing on the lot, while losing housing units in the process?

What is the real deal, intelligent people ask, when the Seaside Company, the owner and operator of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, owns 35 empty units in the same neighborhood. If these Seaside Company units or a few of the empty lots were developed, no one need be displaced or made homeless, just moved over to their new digs.

The City of Santa Cruz is quick to admit that the Seaside Company can tie them up in court for years if they tried to use eminent domain against the amusement park owner. So city officials need to take land from those with less resources.

The families that live in the Dolphin-Lee were instrumental last year in helping defeat another City redevelopment scheme that would have demolished low-income housing and dislocated mostly Latino citizens from the Beach Flats/South of Laurel area near the Beach Boardwalk. They organized, attended meetings, and did not allow the alteration of their neighborhood or the displacement of over 20 families in the immediate area

or the emptying of another 162 units of affordable housing in an adjacent area.

Under that plan, called the Beach Flats/South of Laurel Plan and the Third Street Realignment project, any small property owners would have had their property legally snatched (eminent-domained) then also. The main beneficiary of this failed scheme would have been the Seaside Company.

Without these organized Hispanic families, it seems inevitable that this plan will raise its ugly head again, complete with all its ugly front men. City government will break the backbone of the resistance by emptying the Dolphin and the Lee apartments under the benign auspices of low-cost housing.

They will knock down low-cost housing to put up less low-cost housing in its place. Only in America, folks! But especially in Santa Cruz where the word "Progressive" has become synonymous with "speaks with forked tongue."

I spoke with a single parent named Graciella and her 5 year old daughter, Hess, a few months ago. She wanted things to stay the same in her neighborhood; she treasured her security there. She has no relatives here.

Out of her minimum wage earnings

after taxes, she pays \$5.00 a day childcare for Hess (\$10.00 a day if Hess is ill and cannot go to school), her share of the \$525 per month rent, food for the two of them, and the clothing and shoes they need for school and work. She shares her small apartment with a single roommate who does not have children.

Graciella does not have a car, walks to work, and her child goes to school on the bus. Although she does not earn very much money for her full-time work, she says things were much worse for her and her child in Mexico where she could not even afford to buy her child a small piece of cake or a treat let alone the necessities of life. She does not have time to make friends as her work takes her days and her child takes all the rest of her time, not to mention housework and meals.

Her daughter is perfectly behaved, with sparkling eyes. She is in kindergarten, gets good grades, is learning English and is very shy. Her daughter may not talk a lot, but her smile speaks volumes. She smiles at me through the whole interview. At one point, when her mother tells me that she is dedicated to her daughter, her daughter gets an impish grin on her face and says she does not let her mother have a boyfriend. I ask her why.

"Because I need her," she says very seriously, and then goes back to smiling

while hugging her mom.

Graciella is very worried about this redevelopment project because she remembers a time when there was not enough work for her and she could not pay her rent. No one made her leave her apartment and everyone helped her.

"Mexican people help each other," she says, and she wants to stay where she feels cared for.

She has a close relationship with the manager of the Dolphin, Maria Gutierrez, who she says has helped her very much during the last two years. She is relaxed and confident in this setting, and I hate to think of her and Hess outside this haven.

She describes her sense of belonging in this way: "No one stares at me here or treats me like I am stupid. I live without welfare or food stamps. I can work and take care of myself and know that others watch out for my little girl and I. I do not drink or go out. I am a good mother, why can't people leave us alone so we can keep doing well?"

The manager, Maria Gutierrez, expressed great sadness recently when she saw that some of the tenants were falling for the sales pitch for the new housing. She said, "When it is too late, they will realize the trick to get them out is going to leave them in a grave situation, and I am especially concerned about the children."