



# County of Santa Cruz

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## REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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January 14, 2004

Agenda: January 27, 2004

Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

### **Status Report on State Farm Worker Housing Program**

Dear Members of the Board:

In October 2001, your Board approved a Housing Action Plan that established a work plan for a number of housing items. Over the intervening two years, your Board has received a number of follow up reports and implementation items to address the issues raised in that Plan. One of the issues discussed in the Housing Action Plan involved a further analysis of the potential to increase the opportunities for both permanent and seasonal farm worker housing.

To this end, in an effort specifically to address seasonal housing needs, staff has, over the past two years, been exploring the potential for developing and financing new, safe, and decent farm worker housing using the provisions of the State's Employee Housing Act. As you may recall, this State law allows for the construction of temporary, seasonal or permanent employee housing for 12 or fewer agricultural workers on privately owned farm land without requiring a local conditional use permit, zoning variance or other zoning approval that is not required for any other agricultural activity in the same zone. The staff has made periodic reports on its progress to the Board, and in response to the most recent October 7, 2003 report, the Board directed staff to sponsor an informational meeting with farmers on the issue of housing seasonal workers on farmland. Staff was asked to work with Board members to identify key players to invite to the forum and to provide your Board with a status report on this effort.

The potential to utilize the Employee Housing Act to develop migrant housing units has been discussed with grower representatives, who initially suggested to the Agency that farmers would support the development of housing on farmland as long as they could avoid becoming landlords. In previous reports, the staff outlined and specified how such a program may work if all the necessary components were in place. A key necessary component is the local farmer who owns land and who is experiencing a need to house seasonal workers.

On December 11, 2003, staff, Supervisors Campos and Pirie along with the director of South County Housing (a non-profit housing development corporation) held a community forum with about a dozen agricultural growers to discuss the issues related to housing migrant workers. Invitations were sent to all names on the Agricultural Commissioner's mailing list (containing almost 800 names) and the District Supervisors also extended personal invitations.

At the forum the Staff presentation covered a variety of issues related to farm worker housing needs. Staff outlined the provisions of the State's Employee Housing Act and listed examples of housing for farm workers provided by agricultural growers around the State under the Act. Growers were told that they could also apply locally to build units under the Act. Finally, the presentation focused on the Agency's pilot program involving a private/public partnership development model to provide housing through a three-way partnership among the Agency, a nonprofit development corporation and the grower.

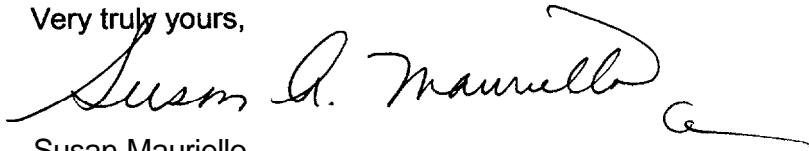
Following the staff presentation there was a general discussion about the overall need for farm worker housing. While the participants at the meeting indicated that the greatest need for farm worker housing is for families, and that families (including migrant families) are better housed in cities, there was a general belief that the Employee Housing Act could potentially accommodate the needs of some growers and farm workers in the rural areas both on a seasonal and permanent basis. Indeed, some growers have demonstrated an interest by applying to the County for a permit to build a "caretaker" unit. At the meeting staff discussed the distinctions between the County's approval process required for "caretaker units" and the potential use of the provisions of the State Employee Housing Act, which treats farm worker housing for up to 12 employees as an allowed agricultural use on agriculturally zoned land and does not require a discretionary land use approval from the Board of Supervisors.

In conclusion, the forum was helpful in clarifying the information and resources available to local growers who want to provide housing for their workers. To this end, the staff has prepared the attached draft informational brochure (Attachment 1) describing the Employee Housing Act and the Agency's pilot program. It is recommended that this material be finalized and made available to interested growers and at the Planning Department's informational counter. In addition, the Agency will continue to encourage local growers to pursue all available avenues to address the housing needs of farm workers, and staff will return to your Board, as appropriate, to discuss specific proposals by growers to pursue farm worker housing projects under this program or through other programs.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that your Board:

1. Accept and file this status report on this program;
2. Finalize the attached informational brochure on the Employee Housing Act and direct staff to work with the Planning Department to distribute this brochure to interested growers and through the Planning Department's public information counter; and
3. Direct staff to continue to explore options for increasing farm worker housing in the County and return to the Board, as appropriate, to discuss specific farm worker housing proposals.

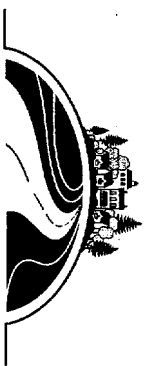
Very truly yours,



Susan Mauriello,  
Redevelopment Agency Executive Director

Attachment

cc: Planning Department  
Farm Bureau



In summary, the State's Employee Housing Act allows farmer/growers to build new manufactured housing units for 12 or fewer agricultural employees on their land without local zoning permits or variances. By working in partnership with a non-profit developer and the Redevelopment Agency, farmer/growers can easily construct new, safe and decent housing for their employees thus ensuring a work force for their agricultural labor needs.

If you would like additional information about the Redevelopment Agency's Farm Worker Housing Pilot Project, please call Rob McBurney at (831) 454-3149 (or E-mail to [red022@co.santa-cruz.ca.us](mailto:red022@co.santa-cruz.ca.us)).

## Building Farm Worker Housing Under the State Employee Housing Act

### Introduction

The State's Employee Housing Act, allows farmers to build farm worker housing on agricultural land without a local conditional use permit, zoning variance or other zoning clearance. The Act allows the construction of temporary, seasonal or permanent employee housing for 12 or fewer agricultural workers. Manufactured housing units that meet State regulations for agricultural workers can now be easily installed on privately owned farm land. This brochure summarizes this law so that you can build these units yourself. This brochure also outlines a development model proposed by the Redevelopment Agency which may have some advantages to you as well as result in affordable housing.

### Provisions of the Employee Housing Act (California Health and Safety Code Section 17000 et seq)

- ✓ The Act provides for the construction of temporary, seasonal or permanent employee housing on agriculturally zoned property for 12 or fewer employees who are agricultural workers.
- ✓ Considers the construction of employee housing an allowed agricultural use that does not require any conditional use permit or other zoning clearance that is not required by any other agricultural activity in the same zone.
- u Employee housing is a "principal permitted use" within "CA" or "AP" zoned districts and will only need building permits and meet basic health and safety requirements.
- ✓ Applications for employee housing are exempt from review e Agricultural Policy

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