

ORANGE COUNTY

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Santa Ana Council Hit for Denying Loan Funds

By G. M. BUSH
and CARMEN RAMOS
CHANDLER,
Times Staff Writers

Reacting to the Santa Ana City Council's decision not to approve a \$100,000 emergency loan fund for families displaced by the city's crackdown on substandard housing, community activists Tuesday condemned the council action as insensitive and senseless.

"I was very, very upset, so upset that I was shaking," said Martha Ramirez, director of the consortium of community groups called Santa Ana Neighborhood Organizations. "I've had time to think about it and I am still upset that our City Council could be so mean, so rude and cruel to families with children," she said.

"It was quite clear that their intention was not to help the families dislocated by the housing code program," she declared.

\$1,000 Loans Denied

In a 4-3 decision, the City Council refused to create a program that would have provided loans of up to \$1,000 to elderly and handicapped residents and families with children who have lived in a condemned dwelling for at least 90 days.

Loan recipients would have been required to show that they had exhausted all other housing resources and that they had no funds available to rent temporary housing or relocate themselves and their belongings.

The loan fund would have come from \$4.5 million in federal grants awarded to the city for housing-related programs.

Contributing to the angry reac-

COUNCIL: Housing Fund Denial Scored

tion was the fact that the council did not reach its decision until about 1:15 a.m. Tuesday after a lengthy meeting, and the fact that the public was not given an opportunity to speak.

"There were mothers with babies asleep in their arms who had to go home because it was so late—and they didn't even let them speak," Ramirez said.

"All they were worried about was where the money was going to come from and whether outside agencies (would be) willing to administer the program," she said. "Their intentions were quite clear; they were not willing to help those people who were dislocated."

Phil Freeland, the city's director of planning and development services whose department is in charge of the housing code enforcement, helped design the loan program.

"I am disappointed with the decision by the City Council, but they make the policy for the city," Freeland said a few hours after the council vote.

In a report to the council Tuesday morning on the status of the code-enforcement program, Freeland said that 53 dwelling units have been ordered vacated by city inspectors since early April. Of those 53, he described 49 as "illegal units such as sheds, shacks, trailers and garages."

He estimated that 310 individuals, including 244 family members, have been affected by eviction notices and that 61 families may thus have been eligible for relocation assistance under the loan program.

City Manager Robert C. Bobb said he, too, was disappointed, and that he is working with the city attorney's office to find ways that the city can force landlords to pay for relocating tenants from slum housing.

"We are still enforcing the housing code program very, very strongly, and if we determine a home is unsafe, then those individuals will have to relocate," he said. "Our major goal is to clean up our city and that is what we are going to do."

Councilman Gordon Bricken, who opposed the program, said there were two reasons why he voted against it:

"Of the people I talked to, all of them said they thought this was the wrong thing to do. Also, the program was so encumbered by restrictive provisions that it would not have helped anybody. It was what I would call a Hollywood movie set situation; it looks real in the front, but behind it there is nothing."

Bricken added that the community leaders who called the council insensitive were thinking only of themselves.

Bricken was joined by Mayor Robert Luxembourger

and Councilmen John Acosta and P. Lee Johnson in voting down the proposal.

Crystal Sims, an attorney with the Legal Aid Society, which represents many of the displaced tenants, called the council's decision "unfortunate." She said that the loans, for many of the tenants, would have been their only source of money to cover moving expenses.

"I'm sure they are going to end up in the streets. When (that will happen) just depends on how strictly the city follows the vacate orders. It will be later if the city gives some sort of leeway for people to look for another place to live."

Jean Forbath, chairwoman of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, said she was outraged by the council's decision, and charged that the council is turning its back on displaced tenants.

"It just reinforces a feeling some people had that the City Council is not really concerned about the people, but that they are concerned about 'Santa Ana Beautiful,'" she said.

Clara Nava, president of the Santa Ana chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens, said her organization will be meeting this week with other community groups and individuals to devise a course of action.

Nava said she was particularly upset because many of the people who had planned to address the council had been invited to do so by the city manager and Vice Mayor Dan Grisnet.