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## Wards' dog shelter advances

**NORCO: The Planning Commission supports a permit; the City Council will have final say.**

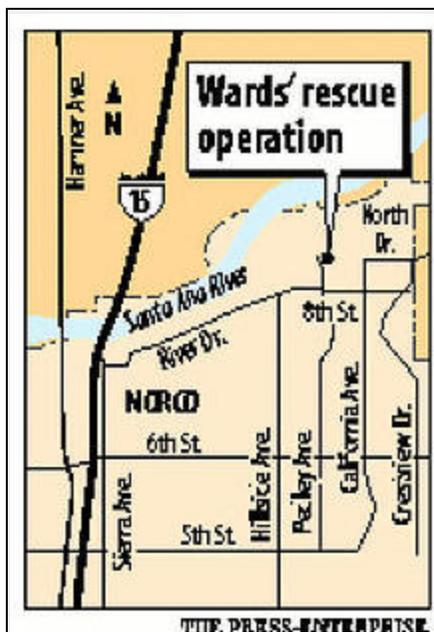
12:52 AM PST on Thursday, January 29, 2004

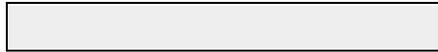
By LINDA LOU / The Press-Enterprise

**NORCO** - The only dog-rescue shelter in the city is a step closer to gaining a permanent place on Burt and Tracy Ward's property after a 7-year-long community debate.

The city Planning Commission on Wednesday supported, 4-1, a request for a conditional-use permit that if approved by the City Council would allow Burt and Tracy Ward to run their dog-rescue operation at their 4.6-acre home on Pedley Avenue.

Norco City Council members will make the final decision about the Wards' special permit and would likely discuss the issue in February, said James Daniels, the city's community development director.





The shelter, Gentle Giants Rescue and Adoptions Inc., specializes in taking care of Great Danes, mastiffs and other large dogs. It has been operating since 1994 without a permit. Neighbors began complaining about it in 1997.

Wednesday night, commissioners tacked on conditions to the permit that included enclosing the Wards' trash bin, having waste picked up twice a week, possibly moving back an access gate to mitigate traffic along Pedley Avenue and having annual checkups of the animals.

In addition, the Wards will be permitted to keep a maximum of 55 animals on their property. Without a conditional-use permit, Norco residents are allowed to have at most four dogs on their properties.

Ten speakers, in addition to Burt Ward, who played Robin on the "Batman!" TV series in the 1960s, addressed the commission. About half praised Ward's efforts to rescue dogs, but the others complained about loud barking, trash problems and traffic.

Keith and Debi Harrington, who live across from the Wards and collected 15 signatures seeking to deny the permit, said they are not against the rescue services, but don't want a dog shelter in their neighborhood.

"I am extremely disappointed," Keith Harrington said. "I don't think the commission paid attention to what the neighbors want. We would like to see the City Council reject this permit."