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Architect unveils drawings of city shelter for homeless

By Frank Sweeney
Mercury News Staff Writer

Berkeley architect Christopher Alexander has been chosen to design San Jose's new shelter for homeless people, to be built just west of the downtown area.

Alexander has produced preliminary drawings for a two-story shelter on a 17,000-square-foot lot at the southeast corner of Julian and Montgomery streets.

There is nothing on the city-owned lot now but two abandoned cars.

The facility, which Alexander describes as "a way-station" or place for a homeless person "to get yourself together before you rejoin

society," will house as many as 75 people temporarily.

It will be built with \$800,000 in city redevelopment money and be operated by the San Jose Urban Ministry with state financing.

Alexander displayed the preliminary design Monday at the San Jose offices of Housing for Independent People, the private organization that is heading the shelter project.

The two-story building will have an entry courtyard and two other courtyards so homeless people "can look in and decide whether they want to be a part of this scene," said Al Diludivico, executive director of the organization.

"The design is critical. If it were designed as an institution, people are going to stay away," he said.

Diludivico estimated that more than 4,000 people in the San Jose area are homeless. About half are mentally ill.

Alexander, before doing the preliminary drawings, talked with a number of homeless people in downtown San Jose to find out what they would want in a shelter.

He said they want privacy and don't want to feel that they are under surveillance. They want to be sheltered in small groups, not in a barracks.

Alexander said his design does just that.