

Fluoridation approved



The Watsonville City Council listens to opinions during the fluoridation meeting Tuesday night. Cedric Synnestvedt/Register-Pajaronian

City Council gives OK after a 5-2 vote

By CEDRIC SYNNESTVEDT
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

The Watsonville City Council voted "yes" on water fluoridation in a special meeting Tuesday night.

The vote was 5 to 2. City Council members Betty Bobeda and Judy Doring-Nielsen were the only ones to say "no" to fluoridation, both expressing that there was still research that needed to be done on the issue and there was too much contradictory evidence.

"I have received more calls on this issue than on anything else in the 10 years I've been here," Bobeda said. "Every single one asked me to vote 'no.'"

Residents from Watsonville and surrounding communities packed into the City Hall building on Main Street in Watsonville Tuesday night, some holding posters supporting water fluoridation, some holding posters denouncing it.

One man held up a sign through-



A man waves a sign protesting fluoridation at the City Council meeting Tuesday night.

Cedric Synnestvedt
Register-Pajaronian

out the meeting that said "Fluoride is Poison" in big red letters. Another man shouted out in protest at the beginning of the meeting, saying that it was unlawful for the meeting to be held in such a small building where not as many people could attend.

The first to speak in opposition to the issue was Jeff Green, the national director for the group Citizens for Safe Drinking Water. Green said that the real answer to the problem of tooth

FLUORIDE

From page 1

decay in Watsonville's children lay not in "putting chemicals into our water," but in education and better oral hygiene. He brought up the subject of "baby bottle tooth decay" after one proponent speaker displayed pictures of children with ravaged teeth. Green said that there was a large amount of evidence contrary to the belief that fluoride will help prevent tooth decay.

"We ask that you do your homework and look closely at this issue," Green said, addressing the council. Another member of the Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, Gary Arnold, said it would be "a violation of the people's right to vote" if the council were to make a decision on the issue.

"What causes cavities in children is sweets and not brushing your teeth," said Dorothy Leech, a resident of Watsonville who was there in opposition.

But the majority of the audience appeared to be in support of the issue — most of them doctors, dentists and health specialists — and speakers who were proponents made their point over and over again that it was "an issue of public health and the health of their children" and they urged City Council members not to hesitate in taking action.

One local dentist supporting the issue said that in Watsonville there is an "epidemic of tooth decay" among the children of the community. He cited a recent study in which they screened 10,000 students from Watsonville High and found 77 percent of them were suf-

fering from tooth decay.

"This is an issue of public health for the entire community," said City Council member Ana Ventura Phares who supported fluoridation. Watsonville first discussed the option of fluoridation some 36 years ago and back then, city voters turned it down.

The subject of costs for implementing fluoridation systems was only briefly touched upon during the five-hour-long meeting. The Water Fluoridation Committee has estimated that the cost to install the system would be about \$750,000. Maintenance and operation of the system is estimated to cost \$200,000 each year cost of replacing the equipment. The question of where that money will come from was also raised by City Council member Raphael Lopez who voted "yes" on the subject. The answer was not clear but it was mentioned that a number of private resources were available.

To fluoridate Watsonville will be more expensive than most other cities because of the fact that Watsonville's water comes from 11 separate wells and one filtration plant in Corralitos. Therefore 12 separate fluoridation systems would have to be built. It was not discussed as to when the project would begin.

A local resident who opposed fluoridation, Pattie Mills, said that they were going to keep fighting the issue. "Without a doubt we will work to not let this go any further," she said.

The final vote was cast by Mayor Charles Carter who said "yes" to fluoridation. "I'm thinking about the health of 15,000 or so children in this community and I'm casting my vote for them," he said.