

Penny parking on its way out

The days of the penny parking meter may be over in Watsonville.

The City Council will discuss that possibility tomorrow night, on a recommendation of City Administrative Services Director Chuck Comstock. Comstock, on the advice of parking officer Chery French, has recommended to the council that it do away with the one-cent, six-minute parking interval on downtown meters, replacing it with a five-cent, 30-minute minimum.

"The real gain in eliminating pennies," Comstock wrote in a memo to the council, "is in the Finance Department where the pennies are counted, bagged and prepared for deposit. We process about \$200 a week in pennies." (That's 20,000 pennies).

He also said a survey taken downtown indicates most people put in enough pennies for 18 to 24 minutes anyway, then find themselves with parking tickets because they need just a few more minutes to complete their business.

Comstock also recommended changing the maximum time from one to two hours for on-street meters, and making it possible to use quarters for convenience. For meters in city parking lots, a quarter would buy three hours rather

than the current five hours.

Also on tomorrow's agenda is a hearing on city plans to condemn and buy El Michoacan Restaurant, 272 Main St., and use the property for a parking lot for City Hall.

Property owner Maria De La Garza opposes the condemnation. Her lawyer has told the council that she planned to reopen the restaurant, which has been closed.

The council will also talk about what to do about a developer's request to buy some city-owned land near Ramsay Park for inclusion in a proposed 112-unit townhouse project.

The developer, Norman Schwartz, has asked to buy about 5,000 square feet of city land south of the tennis courts at Ramsay Park. He reasons the land transfer would make road alignment and property lines more logical, according to Richard A. Wadsworth, a civil engineer with Mid Coast Engineers in Watsonville.

City Attorney Don Haile has recommended the council send the idea to the Parks and Recreation Commission for study. The land in question includes park land and an old right-of-way for Harkins Slough Road.

The meeting is to begin at 4 p.m. tomorrow in the council chambers, City Hall.