

# Routine board appointments draw fire

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Two ostensibly non-controversial resolutions brought before City Council last night were stalled for close to an hour by a debate peppered with buzzwords of decades past.

Nominations for two new city representatives — one for the Library Board and one for the Planning Commission — were on the table. The nominees were both well-known members of the community — one a former Watsonville city councilman, the other an author and Watsonville historian.

The problem, raised by a local Latino activist at the meeting, was that both nominees were Anglo.

In view of Watsonville's majority Latino and Mexican population, Pedro Castillo asked that the nominations be postponed until the council had a chance to raise its consciousness about increasing ethnic diversity on city commissions.

Castillo pointed to the percentages of several seven-member boards: the Library Board currently has two with Spanish surnames; the Personnel Commission has three; two on the Planning

Commission; and three on Recreation and Parks.

"The city is ... roughly 60, 65 percent Spanish surnamed Latino-Mexicano, yet that is not reflected in the various commissions, said Castillo. "We really need to have at least four or five members with Spanish surnames, Latino-Mexicanos, on each commission. ... When we changed from an at-large to a district city council, one of things that was discussed was inclusion, empowerment, lack of representation that certain members of this community did not have."

While this is reflected on the City Council, where three of the seven are Latinos, Castillo said, "I don't think this has filtered down into the city commissions."

"It is incumbent on the council to do outreach" in finding qualified "people of color" to fill the commission seats. "I don't think the council has been aggressive enough" in getting in touch with Latino organizations, Castillo said.

Several councilmembers said they would be happy to appoint more minorities, but that there was a problem in finding such

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qualified, willing candidates.

"Where are all these people who are willing to serve?" Councilman Al Alcalá asked. "They know these boards are here. I've never had anyone call me at my office and say, 'Mr. Alcalá, I would like to serve.'"

Councilman Oscar Rios, whose efforts to reach the Latino population Castillo praised, asked that the council postpone its decision to discuss the problem.

But the remaining councilmembers said it would be unfair to the nominees to renege on the appointments at the last minute. While agreeing in concept to ad-

dress the issue, they wanted to proceed with the nominations.

Councilman Todd McFarren, who nominated former city councilman Dennis Osmer to the Planning Commission, defended his appointment. "I thought long and hard on the aspect of ethnic diversity," he said. "But the Planning Commission is adrift. And Osmer is the best candidate to help."

He said he would be happy to delay the vote for two weeks and discuss the problem, but that he would still appoint Osmer.

Councilwoman Betty Bobeda, who nominated Betty Lewis to the Library Board, also said she was not opposed to discussing the issue of ethnic diversity. But she said she, too, would resubmit Lewis in two weeks, and didn't want to hold up filling the position.

In two unanimous votes, the council approved Lewis for the Library Board and continued until Dec. 14 Osmer's appointment as a planning commissioner.

"It appears that Pedro is objecting to the appointments because the people being appointed are white," Osmer told the Register-Pajaronian this morning. "That's racism, and we need to steer away from that sort of racism."

Calling the criticism of the lack of ethnic diversity "an old complaint," Osmer said, "(Castillo) has been a public whiner about this for a long time and needs to get off his butt and do something about it."

"The problem is," Osmer said, "people need to step forward. You can't drag them out."