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City commission recommends 'generic name' for youth center

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Despite a strong showing last night in support of naming Watsonville's new youth center for the late farm labor leader Cesar Chavez, the city Recreation and Parks Commission voted for a more generic designation: The Watsonville Youth Center.

As part of the commission's recommendation to the City Council, the new center, scheduled to open sometime in May, will feature a "wall of fame" honoring the five people whose names had been suggested.

City Council chambers were packed for last night's hearing, mostly by people wanting the facility at Union and Maple streets to honor Chavez, who died last April.

A good number of people also turned out wanting the center named for Gene Hoularis, a former director of the Watsonville

Boys Club and a longtime volunteer with Pajaro Valley youth. Hoularis' name had received the weightiest stack of nominations before the hearing.

After more than two hours of testimony, the commission voted 6-1 in favor of a Watsonville Youth Center designation.

The vote reflected the feelings of Nane Alejandriz, of *Barrios Unidos*. Alejandriz urged that the naming of the center not be allowed to become a divisive issue in the community or to eclipse more pressing youth issues.

Commissioner Pedro Castillo cast the lone dissenting vote. Castillo had wanted to name the center for the late Waldo Rodriguez, a local Pajaro Valley businessman and community activist who was instrumental and a plaintiff in the landmark lawsuit that brought about district elections to Watsonville.

Rodriguez is also remembered for his contributions during earthquake recovery, his involvement with youth and gang-prevention programs, and as a local United Farm Workers organizer.

The recommendation could go before the council at its March 8 meeting. But Pat Donohue, Recreation and Parks director, said because of the heavy interest, another special meeting will probably be scheduled before a final decision is made.

The other names that had been considered were Jessica Cortez, the 9-year-old Pajaro girl who was murdered last week with her older brother as they walked home from a Pajaro bakery; Norman "Sig" Lien, who had served as a Recreation and Parks commissioner, a school principal and Santa Cruz County superintendent of schools; and the Rev. Raul Rojas, founder of the Penny Club.