

City assured post office to be built

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Watsonville city officials say they knew it all along, but are nevertheless breathing a little easier today knowing that the U.S. Postal Service has allocated \$2.8 million to design and build a post office on Main Street's 200 block.

Funding for the project was uncertain last week, casting some doubt over the city's plan to anchor its downtown revitalization with the new post office building.

But a postal official confirmed yesterday that cuts have been made elsewhere in the Postal Service budget for the new fiscal year, leaving intact funds that were set aside to design and build the new Watsonville post office.

"It's a go-ahead for fiscal year 1987-88," which began Saturday, said Gus Ruiz, director of communications for the Postal Service's San Jose division. "There's no indication that Watsonville won't get its (new) post office."

City Manager John Radin said, "That's reassuring. I know there were a lot of rumors going around. But who's going to spend \$1.8 million (to buy the land from the city) and then say they don't have a building? I knew they had the funds."

Mayor Betty Murphy had the same reaction.

"I'm delighted to hear about it, and I thought that's what was going to happen," she said.

But that's not how it appeared last week, when postal officials said they were re-examining all their projects for possible cuts.

The Postal Service is pinching pennies this year, but has decided the Watsonville project should be built, Ruiz said.

"Every corporation goes through the same thing, being cost-conscious," he said. "We're just like any other business."

Approximately \$2.8 million has been set aside for the project, Ruiz said. Including the cost of the land, that means the Postal Service will spend at

least \$4.5 million on the new Watsonville site.

An architect has been chosen to design the 25,000-square-foot building, but a contract has yet to been signed, Ruiz said. An agreement is expected in the next two weeks, he said.

Designing the building should take about six months, and it would take another nine months to build the new post office, which could be open for business by December 1989, Ruiz said.

That's good news for city officials, who are banking on the new post office building to make the downtown a more attractive place for shoppers.

The city spent \$6 million buying up the entire 200 block and sold the Postal Service three acres bounded by Second and Rodriguez streets for \$1.725 million. The rest of the block is slated for commercial development, although year-long negotiations between the city and a developer who wants to buy and build on the land have broken off.

Radin and Murphy are scheduled to meet with postal officials in about two weeks to discuss how much say the city will have in designing the new building.

Murphy said she's hoping to persuade a Postal Service official to attend the Oct. 27 City Council meeting to discuss the project with all the council members.

Should construction begin next year, it would be exactly 10 years after city officials first approached the Postal Service about building a new post office.

That's not surprising, since government bureaucracies are usually "real slow," Radin said.

"Look how long it took us with the sewer plant," he said.

City officials began courting legislators and representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1973 hoping to get federal grants to upgrade the sewage-treatment plant. A decade later, the city had the grants.