

Local

Two groups want to stage Antique Fly-In

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WATSONVILLE — The Watsonville Antique Fly-In — the city's biggest civic event — may yet get off the ground this year.

Two competing proposals to sponsor the annual airshow over Memorial Day weekend will be presented to the City Council Tuesday night. One is from a local group of volunteers who've been involved in the Fly-In for many years, the Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show Committee. The other comes from the Northern California Antique Airplane Association, which has co-sponsored the event for 25 years.

The future of the Fly-In was left hanging in the air last September when the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture decided to drop its co-sponsorship, citing the long hours put in by staff and the cost effectiveness of the effort.

The Fly-In usually draws crowds of 15,000 to 30,000, has a budget of \$134,000 and shows a \$20,000 profit.

The Fly-In's fate was further clouded by plans to begin repairs to the airport runway this spring. City Manager John Radin recently suggested the event be postponed a year until the work is completed, but the City Council deferred a decision until hearing from groups interested in sponsoring it.

Neither group offering to sponsor the Fly-In wants it postponed.

"I think it will be very difficult to get it re-started if it's postponed a year," said Kevin Brezil, vice president of the local group that wants to sponsor the event. "The people who come here every year have been coming for 15 to 20 years. They begin planning for it a year in advance and if they hear it's cancelled they'll go to another show.

"It's the only event in the Watsonville-Santa Cruz area that draws that kind of crowd," he said.

"I think it would kill the event if it were not held at all," said Gayle Womack, president of the antique aircraft group. "This is the first event of the year and we're known all over over, even in Europe."

The major difference between the two proposals is what would be done with the profits. Under the old formula, the chamber and NCAAA split the profits 50-50.

Brezil's group of 10 people is forming a non-profit organization for the Fly-In. The group plans to split the proceeds among the non-profit organizations that sell food and drinks at the airshow.

"We'll charge the non-profits a flat fee comparable to the fee they pay now. They will get to keep all the money they make above that," he said. Under the old plan non-profits had to pay a percentage of their profits to the Fly-In, as well as a participation fee.

At the end of the air show, the volunteers will vote on how to divvy up the profits among the non-profit organizations, based on their participation level. Brezil estimates the air show will have a profit of about \$19,500.

Womack's plan involves about five pilots' groups, including the Watsonville Pilots' Association, she said.

The estimated \$20,000 in profits would go to a fund to establish an aircraft museum in southern Santa Clara County. The Santa Clara Board of Supervisors has approved the group's architectural design for the museum and is working on getting a three-acre site for the facility, Womack said.

"We're the founders of the event. We originated it 25 years ago because of pilots that wanted to fly over to the Apple Festival," Womack said. "I think the community has benefited from it."

Both groups say they could work together, if the council requires that. But in reality, their goals differ substantially.

The local group wants the Fly-In to be more than an antique air show.

"We've never had the type of air show that draws people. I'm not trying to cut out the antique aircrafters, but people want to see jets and monster trucks running over a plane," Brezil said. "We brought in an arts and crafts show two years ago, and if I had my way we'd have a carnival."

But Womack disagrees.

"We have a unique event. It's not like Moffett Field or the Salinas Air show. The specialness is we have an ability to bring in pilots interested in aviation. I don't really believe the Watsonville group has the same goals as us."