

Redevelopment Issue

County Considers Suing Watsonville

County supervisors are faced with deciding whether or not to sue the city of Watsonville over its redevelopment plans.

A debate erupted among supervisors Tuesday when County Counsel Clair Carlson asked for a closed session, presumably to talk over the possibility of suing the city of Watsonville.

While Fourth (Watsonville) District Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. and First (Live Oak) Supervisor Dan Forbus urged the board to talk things over with Watsonville officials before filing suit, the majority of the board

didn't seem convinced talking would do much good.

The issue remained unresolved, with no closed session held Tuesday and no decision made for a meeting with the Watsonville City Council.

Moore flatly refused to attend any closed session to discuss a possible suit against Watsonville, explaining he wouldn't go behind closed doors to talk about an issue involving taxpayers' money.

He added that by holding such a closed session, the board would destroy any possibility of good feelings between supervisors and Watsonville city councilmen.

But both Carlson and Assistant County Counsel Dwight Herr requested a closed session be held.

The county is against a recent move by the Watsonville City Council to amend its downtown redevelopment plan, believing that the amendment of the plan will cause the county to lose \$1 million in property taxes over the next 10 years.

Through the redevelopment process, and increases in property taxes could go directly to the city of Watsonville for use in refurbishing the downtown area. Presently, most of these revenues go into county coffers for use throughout the county.

Speaking at a recent Watsonville City Council meeting on behalf of supervisors, Herr claimed that the redevelopment plan passed in 1973 was being amended to state that all funds from increases in property taxes "is hereby irrevocably pledged" to finance the redevelopment project.

The 1973 plan, Herr noted, didn't indicate that these revenues would be the sole source of funding, but instead included other ways the city could fund improvement projects.

It's these other ways to finance improvements that the Board of Supervisors wants the Watsonville City Council to consider.

But despite the county's protest, the Watsonville City Council last week voted 6-0 for the \$4.6 million amended redevelopment plan.

The plan would bring about major improvements to the downtown area, including a large shopping center, a semi-mall on Main Street and a major realignment of Union and Alexander streets, which would involve the demolition of the telephone building.

Moore told his fellow supervisors Tuesday that he had talked individually with Watsonville city council members and they all had expressed a willingness to talk things over.

But Supervisors' Chairman Robley Levy pointed out that before the council's vote, the Board of Supervisors had requested such a meeting to no avail.

The board, Levy said, has suggested four alternative means of financing the redevelopment project, none of which the City Council seems willing to consider.

Levy added that she prefers not to go to court, but in order to avoid a court battle, "I believe the city of Watsonville has to show some kind of willingness to pursue certain alternatives."