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# City fights for sewer-cost break

By STEVE SHENDER

When Watsonville City Council members opened their discussions on the city's 1983-84 budget Thursday night, the budget's chief architect, City Manager John Radin, was not present. Radin was on a lightning visit to Washington, D. C., where, according to Councilman Frank Osmer — also in Washington — he was negotiating with Environmental Protection Agency officials to reduce the costs of the city's new wastewater treatment plant.

Radin, in Baltimore, Md., this morning, could not be reached for comment about his trip, but Osmer, in a telephone interview from his Washington hotel room, said, "John has found what he thinks is a way to save a tremendous amount of money on

(sewer plant) operating costs." Osmer indicated that the city manager's solution might involve doing away with a \$33 million sewage treatment plant the city has been ordered to build and simply building a new ocean outfall line instead.

"We may be able to get the ocean outfall thing, and meet (federal) standards without having to spend the \$33 million for wastewater treatment," said Osmer. He noted that while the plant itself would be paid for mainly by federal and state grants, operational costs of the facility would have to be borne by city utility customers, with

food processors, who produce most of the wastewater, carrying most of the burden.

"We're looking at trying to reduce the operational costs of whatever we get into," the councilman said. He indicated that Radin's plan — whatever it is — could save the city "\$1 million a year" in sewer plant operational expenses.

Osmer said this morning that Radin's trip had been prompted by a call he (Osmer) received from the office of Senator Paul Laxalt early this week. (The Nevada Republican is a personal friend of Osmer's.) Laxalt's office, he indicated,

called to warn him that Watsonville officials had better get back to Washington quickly, to safeguard the city's interests at EPA. "We got a warning that, 'You better come back and see that your house is in order,'" Osmer said.

"They said, 'You better come back and check on this (the wastewater treatment plant) because there's a tremendous amount of changes going on (at EPA under newly appointed Administrator William Ruckelshaus),' " said Osmer.

Osmer said that the city's wastewater treatment grant was itself in no danger. But, he

indicated, there were ways that the already-approved grant could be "manipulated," presumably to the city's disadvantage.

The councilman said his trip to Washington, on a private matter, had been planned for some time when Laxalt's office called him. He said that aides to the senator suggested that it might be a good idea for Radin to make the trip with him.

Other council members and city staff members appeared to know little about the nature of the city manager's trip Thursday evening.

"Something's come up back

there," said City Attorney Don Haile.

"EPA asked him to return because of the change in (agency) administration, which might effect Watsonville's (sewer grant) application," Mayor Ann Soldo said. "He (Radin) got a phone call saying it would be wise for him to come back," said Mrs. Soldo, who authorized Radin's trip.

Other than to indicate that EPA officials were possibly taking a new look at Watsonville's application at the direction of newly appointed agency Director William Ruckelshaus, the mayor said that she did not know any details about the call or the purpose of Radin's trip.

The city manager is to make a report to the council next Tuesday night.

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REFERENCE