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City to ask youth for answers to crime, violence

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By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

The Watsonville City Council called for a meeting of youth, community members, city, county and school representatives, business owners and other community leaders to come up with ideas for improving the effectiveness of youth programs and crime reduction.

The call comes in response to the recent shootings and stabbings involving Watsonville youth.

Watsonville City Manager Steve Salomon said the intention of the meeting is to offer concrete suggestions the council can take action on, not just to talk.

Councilman Oscar Rios suggested that the meetings be taken to schools for suggestions from students. He said that ought to be done first, before the officials met. No date was set for the meeting.

In other action last night, the Council:

- Approved a loan of up to \$60,000 to the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce to help the chamber complete tenant improvements on the ground floor of its building.

The chamber has almost finished renovations to its earthquake-damaged building at 444 Main St., and is in the process of refinancing its building. In the meantime, it has been negotiating with the county and with Pillsbury-Green Giant, both of which are interested in renting space for a career counseling-relocation center for displaced workers. The chamber was in need of money quickly to make needed improvements for the center.

The money to be loaned will come from Measure E funds and would be paid back within a year at a rate of 7 percent.

- Authorized the city manager to solicit local financial institutions to manage a small-business loan fund for the city. The city hopes to create a loan fund that would make small loans of between \$5,000 and \$50,000 to existing businesses and expanding businesses in the city. Housing and Economic Development Director Ned Madonia said it's particularly difficult for businesses to get loans in those smaller amounts.

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Money for the fund would come from Measure E, the countywide sales tax enacted by voters for earthquake recovery. City staff members are suggesting an initial amount of \$250,000 be made available.

The city is seeking help in administering the program from local banks, rather than having staff members or council members make decisions regarding the loans.

- Passed a resolution supporting the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission's request for federal funding to study various transportation options for the Watsonville-Santa Cruz-UC-Santa Cruz traffic corridor. The study will include a detailed look at rail transit, highway widening and transportation demand alternatives. The study will also include a public information and participation program.

The city had previously pledged \$8,000 as a local match portion for this work.

- Appointed Allyne Hammer to the Watsonville Personnel Commission, representing District 4.

- Changed the zoning on a parcel of land on the west side of Green Valley Road between Silver Leaf Drive and Green Meadow Drive from a "visitor commercial" designation to a "thoroughfare commercial" designation, which allows a greater variety of commercial users. The change was made at the request of the property owners to increase its marketability.

When the matter first came before the city's Planning Commission, the commission hesitated in approving the change because it didn't want to hurt downtown businesses. But after hearing from Madonia, who said the outlying commercial areas didn't threaten the downtown, the commission gave its support to the change.

Several council members reiterated the belief that changing the zoning would not endanger the downtown. They voted unanimously for it.