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Council looks for ways to avoid paying fees imposed by county

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The Watsonville City Council seems to be itching to find a way to get out of paying the newly imposed county fees.

The fees are for property-tax collection and for booking people arrested by city police into County Jail.

The matter will be discussed again tonight when the council considers advice from Finance Director Terry Stigall at its 7:30 meeting.

The city has received bills for \$56,146 for property-tax collection in the city and \$11,311 for tax collection within the redevelopment district. Booking fees add up to \$113,158.

At various times the council has voted to delay paying the fees, has asked the city attorney and finance director for advice on how

to legally evade them, and has refused to pay the redevelopment district's bill.

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District and Cabrillo College have also refused to pay the fees for property-tax collection.

Stigall is now advising the council to pay both property tax-collection bills, but to hold off on the booking fees. Stigall's advice is based on changes at the state level to Senate Bill 2557, which went into effect last year, allowing counties to charge cities for those services. The bill was seen as a way to make up for cuts in state funds for county programs.

It appears that the bill may be repealed, Stigall said in a memo to the council. The Senate Local Government Committee voted recently for the repeal, and the bill's author, Sen. Ken Maddy, of Modesto, apparently has also agreed to amend a "cleanup" bill

to repeal the earlier one.

Maddy's new bill would make 2557 a one-year measure, meaning that the fees charged this year would still have to be paid. But it also contains language that makes it clear that redevelopment agencies are subject to the fees. The council had voted not to pay the redevelopment agency's bill, partially on the grounds that the law wasn't clear that such agencies were subject to the fees.

Stigall said he is recommending against paying the booking fees because of another bill that seeks to replace the fees with a \$3 penalty assessment on fines.

"Until the outcome of SB61 is clarified," Stigall wrote, "I believe we should not pay the booking fees."