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# City to contract with private firm for animal-control duties

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Watsonville will contract with a private firm for animal control and the running of its shelter on Watson Street, the City Council decided last night.

The city has been contracting with the Santa Cruz SPCA for more than a year. Watsonville has maintained its own animal control officer, but pets have been taken to the SPCA's Live Oak shelter

daily.  
When the contract began, it was viewed as an interim measure, to keep animals out of the city's run-down pound, while a committee looked into long-term solutions. The committee, which met monthly for nearly a year, became quickly polarized between pro-SPCA and anti-SPCA forces, and was unable to agree on how the city should best proceed.  
In July, the council decided that

Watsonville should have its own shelter and contract out for animal control and shelter staff. It received two responses to its request for proposals: one from Animal Care Equipment & Services, Inc., and one from the SPCA.

The SPCA's proposal wasn't for running the shelter, however. The agency said it was too focused on a plan to improve its current shelter to adequately provide a pro-

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gram for Watsonville. Instead, it proposed to help the city set up its own animal control and shelter program. City staff weren't interested. They recommended that the city negotiate with Animal Care Equipment & Services Inc.

That business, based in Crestline and represented by Santa Cruz resident William R. Meade, is proposing to accept animals 365 days a year and to be open six days a week, 10 hours a day for adoption and stray animal retrieval. It gave the city two options for staffing: two animal-care and animal-control personnel, at a cost of \$166,850 for the first year; and three staffers at \$196,250. While the lower cost is \$50,000 more than it costs the city now for animal control and shelter, Animal Care claims it can raise \$60,000 a year through an aggressive licensing program.

The council voted unanimously to have City Manager Steve Salomon negotiate with Animal Care Equipment & Services for animal control and care.

Claws were sheathed last night, but there was still evidence of the conflict that arose between committee members as speakers addressed the issue of what should be done in the interim.

The SPCA's Kat Brown called the city's existing shelter, "a sub-standard facility" and said it should not be used until it can be remodeled. She suggested that the city continue a month-to-month contract with the SPCA until the new shelter is ready. "To take a step backwards to the old facility would be a mistake," she said.

Meade said he would be happy to work something out for the interim at the current shelter, which, he said, shouldn't be a problem, as long as it's properly cleaned, for the three to five months it will take to complete the remodel.

Ed Moore, a board member from the SPCA, spoke against sheltering animals at the Watson Street shelter in the interim. Watsonville pet owners have become used to coming to the SPCA for a number of months, and "will have no incentive to come to Watson Street" to pick up their pets, he said.

Dave Carroll, a local veterinarian, agreed that there have been problems with the Watson Street site — size, manpower and a lack of an adoption program. While the size will still be a problem during the interim, the shelter could be adequately staffed and a public awareness program put into place, he said.