

Living-wage ordinance nears OK in Watsonville

Living wage 7-2502
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The City Council stepped in line with both the city and county this week, clearing the way for a living-wage ordinance.

If approved, the ordinance would affect all for-profit businesses that provide goods or services to the city under contracts of more than \$10,000.

WATSONVILLE Those contractors would be required to pay a so-called living wage — \$11.50 per hour if benefits are provided or \$12.55 without — for hours an employee spends working on the city contract. New contractors would have to make an effort to offer jobs to employees of a prior contractor if the city changed contractors for any project more than \$50,000.

The Santa Cruz County Living Wage Coalition has asked the city to consider adopting such an ordinance.

Of the nearly 30 people who addressed the council, Dave Bolick, Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce president, was the only voice of dissension. He said the move would quash competition and cost the city more, since businesses not willing or able to offer increased wages would be taken out of the running for city contracts.

Bolick would prefer that the state handle the issue through increases in the minimum wage. A recent chamber survey found that 83 percent of the member businesses responding were opposed to the ordinance.

However, Roberto Garcia with the Santa Cruz County Latino Chamber of Commerce said that employees who are given fair pay “will invest in the local economy by shopping here.”

The council withheld judgment on imposing the same requirements on nonprofit, social service and community service businesses.

Businesses with fewer than five employees, students younger than 18 or involved in a training program, employers offering wages higher than the living wage and employees with a collective union bargaining agreement superseding the ordinance would not be affected. Temporary city employees would not be covered either.

In other business, the council postponed a decision on the alcohol-use policy. This week, several minor changes were proposed, including clarifying the definitions of malt beverages and fortified wines and eliminating wording that would have limited the sales of 375 milliliter “souvenir” bottles. The council will revisit the issue Sept. 10.

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