

# Graffiti proposals may spur debate

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Watsonville residents and merchants will have a chance to tell the city council what they think of two proposed ordinances designed to combat graffiti at a public hearing tonight.

Revisions were made in the proposals after some business owners complained they were being required to pay for graffiti cleanup and to have the cleanup done within seven days.

Merchants will be given more flexibility in how they keep graffiti tools such as fat markers and spray paint away from taggers.

"Some of the merchants and property owners are right when they say that they're victims twice," Watsonville Mayor Lowell Hurst said. "They get hit with graffiti and then they have to go paint it over."

### Partnership with painter

After listening to comments during two meetings in March and April, the graffiti abatement committee decided to recommend that the city enter into a \$20,000 contract with a commercial painter who could clean up graffiti for property owners who are not willing or able to do it. The city of Santa Cruz has a similar arrangement.

"A lot of people felt it wasn't fair," said Nancy Reutlinger, an analyst in the public works department who helped draft the new ordinances. "There was a feeling that graffiti is a community problem, so there should be a community effort to deal with it."

Reutlinger said citizens would not have extra fees to pay for cleanup costs. She said money has already been set aside for it in the city's solid waste budget.

### Priority on cleanup

The revised version of the ordinance will be more cost effective because it will focus on immediate cleanup rather than on bureaucratic enforcement policies, Reutlinger said.

"I think this is more tailored to our community and our goals to keep it clean and graffiti-free," she added.

The original ordinance proposal would have required merchants to keep spray paint and markers in a locked display case or cabinet to prevent shoplifting.

Now they can come up with other methods, such as an adhesive strip that triggers an alarm, as long as the committee approves it first.

Another part of the anti-graffiti plan gets the recreation department involved in sponsoring art

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## Watsonville's new ordinances designed to weed out graffiti

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classes and mural projects for young people. Youths who are caught vandalizing will be asked to join monthly graffiti paint-outs

around the city.

The police department will step up surveillance in hard-hit areas and enforce the youth curfew.

Reutlinger said graffiti is a public nuisance because it is unsightly and promotes a feeling of

lawlessness.

"Once we start paying a little more attention to it and get the materials out of the perpetrators' hands, we can stay ahead of it," Hurst said.

The council might vote on the

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ordinances after the public meeting.

### IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the council chambers, 250 Main St.