

WATSONVILLE  
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# Antique airplane group gets go-ahead on Fly-In

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STAFF WRITER

In a 4-3 vote, the Watsonville City Council last night awarded the sponsorship of this year's Watsonville Fly-In to the agency that has co-sponsored the show since its inception 25 years ago.

Two groups were vying for sponsorship of the show: the Santa Clara County-based Northern California Antique Airplane Association; and the Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show Committee, an organization of local residents who say they've become dissatisfied with the antiquers group after years of working jointly on the event.

Acting on the recommendation of city staff, council members Betty Murphy, Paul Milladin, Johnny Kacsmayk and Parr Eves voted to have the Antique Airplane Association run the show again this year. Mayor Todd McFarren told the groups he was frustrated with their inability to work together, and that he'd vote no on either group doing the show alone. Lowell Hurst and Oscar Rios

joined McFarren in voting against the motion.

Assistant City Manager Chuck Comstock had made his recommendation based on proposals submitted by the two groups. The association had offered to pay all of the city's expenses associated with putting on the show; the local committee had offered \$5,000. City costs in the past have reached \$18,000. The association had also agreed to a \$10 million insurance policy; the committee was preparing a \$5 million policy.

Later, however, the committee presented the city with an addendum to its proposal saying that it would be willing to reimburse the city for its expenses, and that it would take out a \$10 million policy.

Roughly equal numbers of each group's supporters packed the council chambers during the council's afternoon session — sitting on opposite sides of the room — and took turns pleading their case.

The discussion quickly took on a "local people versus outsiders" tone.

Many of the members of the local group prefaced their arguments with the length of time they'd lived in Watsonville. They argued that most of the work on the event has been done by local people, that control of the event should be in the hands of local people, and that all the profits

community."

"The community has benefited much more than what it might seem from the profits coming out," she said.

The Fly-In has traditionally been an opportunity for local non-profit agencies to set up booths and raise money, and has brought out-

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— Councilwoman Betty Murphy

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from the show should stay in the community, which is especially needy after the earthquake.

Gayle Womack, president of the Antique Airplane Association, said that profits from each year's event were about \$10,000 to \$15,000. The association spends about \$100,000 to do the show, she said, and "much of that stays in the com-

of-town dollars to the area, even though the profits from the show have gone to the Antique Association, which is earmarking them for an antique airplane museum in Santa Clara County.

David Kegebein, chairman of the local committee, said the people at the top of the organizational charts for the Fly-In for the last

nine years are the same local people now proposing to run it themselves and that his group was more than qualified.

He declined to go into depth on the reasons why the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce dropped its co-sponsorship of the event and why many local people don't want to work for the airplane association anymore, saying simply that "they didn't feel they were getting an adequate return on their investment."

Lowell Hurst, expressing his support for the local group after the speakers were finished, said, "I firmly believe in local participation and local control... Watsonville people have a vested interest in the community. We don't want the Oxnard people coming up and running our Strawberry Festival, or the Bay Area people running our (proposed) Flower Festival."

Betty Murphy, apparently unable to take the insider-outsider talk any more, said, "This idea that a lot of foreigners are going to invade Watsonville and put a show on is ridiculous.

"The original Fly-In was totally put on by the antiquers. It was only later that the council joined in a 50-50 split. The arrangement was not that the money would go back into the community."

The city has to take a practical look at the matter, she said.

"Our interest is in the sales tax that comes from an event like that," Murphy said. "For once, we can pick the sales tax from someone else's pocket rather than from our city's residents."

Non-profits will still be allowed to set up booths, she said.

Before the vote, Oscar Rios, who had earlier asked the speakers why the groups couldn't work together, asked what the chances were of reconciliation.

"None," said several members of the audience.

The Fly-In has been scheduled for the Memorial Day weekend. A major construction project at the airport, which at one point appeared to threaten the Fly-In, will probably begin the following week.

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1-9