

CITY LEADERS BREAK GROUND ON WATSONVILLE CIVIC CENTER



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Watsonville Mayor Judy Doering-Nielsen, flanked by City Council members Ana Ventura Phares and Antonio Rivas, gestures to an attendee of the groundbreaking ceremony for the Watsonville Civic Center on Friday.

Watsonville Grown New courthouse, library structure scheduled to be completed in 2007

By **DONNA JONES**
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WATSONVILLE — Close to two decades in the making, the delays and obstacles overcome made Friday's groundbreaking ceremony for the city's Civic Center project on Main Street that much sweeter to backers.

More than 100 people attended the celebration on the vacant Main Street lot that will be home to courts, city offices and an expanded city library.

"It's been a long, long bumpy road," said Supervisor Tony Campos. "But I tell you we're here. We're not just celebrating the start of construction. This is a celebration of historic accomplishment in our community."

The project has long been considered key to revitalizing downtown, but the vision for it has changed since development was first considered in the mid-'80s.

At one time a private developer planned a building filled with private offices and retail space.

Granite Rock Co. considered leasing space for its headquarters.

Delays killed those plans.

Officials pointed to the complexity of the final plan, which required putting together a funding package that included money from three federal agencies, as well as Santa Cruz County, Superior Court and the city.

City Manager Carlos Palacios said, for him, the darkest hour came two years ago when the state snatched money from the city redevelopment fund and the project had to be postponed a year.

"At times it was really discouraging, but we knew we had to hold on,"

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Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina supplies his own shovel at the Civic Center groundbreaking ceremony Friday.



Civic Center

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Palacios said. "We never gave up. The community really wanted it to happen."

In its current version, the building will bring three Superior Court rooms and other judicial facilities to the downtown, replacing an outdated and overwhelmed courthouse on Freedom Boulevard.

Sheriff Mark Tracy said he was an early supporter of the court project, which will enable his officers to conduct their security responsibilities more professionally.

"It's a big day for us," he said.

Librarian Deborah Barrow has been looking forward to the 45,000-square-foot library. The library on Union Street is squeezed to meet its mission in the growing city, she said. She still has to wait until 2007 for construction to be complete. But with the first phase — a 460-space garage — already started, the project seems more of a reality than ever.

"It's only a matter of time," Barrow said.

Councilman Antonio Rivas beamed moments after taking a turn with the ceremonial spade.

"We can do it. Si se puede," he said. "You see we can do it, and the community is going to receive all these beautiful services."

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Attendees of Friday's Watsonville Civic Center groundbreaking ceremony mingle near a rendition of the planned building.

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