

Anti-violence program approved

City council earmarks \$333,000 for prevention, youth intervention

By DIANE NOLAND

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Raising the city's children safely may indeed take the efforts of even more than the village of Watsonville.

That appeared to be the thinking of many at Thursday's special city council meeting held to discuss violence and gang activity.

After a three-hour presentation and public hearing, the council

unanimously approved a \$333,292 violence prevention program drafted by the Gang and Violence Task Force, composed of 20 city officials and employees.

City officials outlined the 14-page comprehensive plan for both the short term and long term, including ideas for expanding or merging current programs for young people as well as implementing new programs over the next sev-

eral years.

"It's going to take a lot of hard work and community effort," said City Manager Steve Salomon. "The city as an organization acting alone cannot solve this problem."

However, it can act as a stimulus, he said.

The plan, divided into three parts — prevention, intervention and suppression — requires cooperation from the community and the crimi-

nal justice system if it is to work, Salomon said.

Prevention strategies, planned to begin by Nov. 15 are:

- Extending hours at the Gene Hoularis & Waldo Rodriguez Youth Center from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday. Staffing will be four senior recreation leaders and



Police Chief Terry Medina

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ing these hours.

■ Extending hours at the sports facility from 9 p.m. to 12 a.m. Friday and Saturday. Staffing will be two senior recreation leaders and a gang intervention counselor.

■ Create the Watsonville Learning Center by renovating the old city jail. Hours would be 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. It would house a computer lab with access to the Internet and CD-ROM software. Tutors, a homework center, mentoring programs, job training workshops and computer classes are envisioned.

■ A new program, Opportunity to Work, is proposed to provide 10 young people with employment in the public works and parks departments. The program would provide structure for high-risk youth who have made the decision to change their lives in a positive direction.

Extended hours, such as those proposed for the youth center and sports facility, have had excellent results in reducing gang activity in other areas of California, said Clemente Arrizon, employed with Parks and Recreation.

"This is a program I helped start

in Pacoima and Santa Ana," Arrizon said. "It does work. In the San Fernando Valley it reduced drive-by shootings by 40 percent."

What might not work is finding way to fund the program over several years, Salomon said. Only \$19,000 is immediately available in this year's budget, which froze spending levels. Grants and a one-time receipt of Measure E earthquake recovery sales tax proceeds will help finance the program, he said.

"Long term we don't have funding for and short-term things may not be able to be sustained," Salomon said this morning. "We don't have very much money. Some of that will have to be redirected in the general fund."

The Measure E appropriation will be \$79,000 and Salomon said the city either has or is "aggressively pursuing" \$235,000 in grant money.

Intervention strategies in the overall plan include a contract with Fenix Services for two full-time gang intervention counselors, who would staff a curfew center and the extended hours at the youth center and sports facility. They would also provide outreach on the streets.

Curfew between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. will be enforced and offenders will be taken to the curfew center housed at the youth center. It would be staffed by a Watsonville police

officer, senior recreation leader, Fenix Services counselor and volunteer community service officers, and repeat offenders and their families would be referred to counseling.

"This (curfew program) is not to penalize or fine but to get the kids and their parents into counseling," said Watsonville police Lt. Manuel Solano. Patterned after a program in San Jose, it has made a "significant improvement" in reducing gang and violent activities there, Solano added.

Young people out on dates, doing, "reasonable" business, or going home from recreational activities will not be subject to being taken to the curfew center, Solano said. "We're looking at kids who are getting into trouble."

Plans do call for fines or sentences to community service for habitual repeat offenders.

An expansion of B.A.S.T.A. (Broad Based Suppression Apprehension and Treatment Alternatives) in conjunction with other community efforts, such as Project PRIDE, PeaceBuilders, Pajaritos and Fenix Services, is being considered for implementation Jan. 1. B.A.S.T.A. is a program for youth already involved in the criminal justice system, perhaps with the Probation Department, said Carlos Palacios, assistant city manager.