

# City uneasy about post office plans

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A possible money shortage in the U.S. Postal Service's construction budget may mean yet another delay in — and possibly the death of — plans to anchor Watsonville's downtown redevelopment with a new post office in the 200 block of Main Street.

But it is unclear if such a shortage exists, or if the long delays already experienced in the last year are merely the byproduct of a slow-working bureaucracy.

One postal official, who asked not to be identified, said today there were "constraints" in the budget for the federal agency's fiscal year, which begins tomorrow.

"And I don't know where this (Watsonville) project sits in our budget," he said.

The official refused to disclose what those budget constraints were or whether the Watsonville project was in jeopardy.

He did say that postal officials had been reviewing the Watsonville project for possible revisions in its use and design, but wouldn't say what they were.

The postal service took possession of the three-acre parcel bounded by Rodriguez, Main and Second streets when escrow

closed on the \$1.725 million sale July 2. The site has been cleared of its old buildings since February and remains an empty dirt lot with scattered patches of weeds.

Negotiations between the postal service and an architect to design the new building are expected to be ironed out today, the postal official said.

Money was budgeted for the current fiscal year, which ends today, to pay for the design. But "constraints" in the budget for next year may have an effect on the project, he said.

However, a spokesman for the Postal Service's San Jose division said the project was still part of the proposed budget for the next fiscal year.

A 15-month-long program of design and construction of a 25,000-square-foot building is scheduled to begin during the next year, but no firm date has yet been set, said Gus Ruiz, director of communications.

"There's nothing new to report," Ruiz said. "I haven't heard anything since the last time you called (in March)."

Ruiz said he had no information about the budget for next year, and did not know how much had been set aside to build the new Watsonville post office.

And while questions about the project remain, some city officials are looking for some reas-

suring words and an update on just what's going on.

City Council members have been asking for several weeks that a representative from the postal service come to Watsonville to report on the project.

City Manager John Radin has sent a letter to the postal service asking that a representative address the council. Radin told the council Tuesday, however, that it shouldn't expect an answer for up to six months, because the federal bureaucracy is slow to move on such requests.

That didn't satisfy Councilman Dennis Osmer.

"It may be a small item to the Postal Service, but it's a very big item for the city of Watsonville," Osmer said. "I think it's time the Redevelopment Agency (City Council) find out what's going on, if, indeed, anything is."

Councilwoman Gwen Carroll said she agreed with Radin that dealing with a federal bureaucracy was going to take some time, and that she understood the delay.

Mayor Betty Murphy said it was important to get a representative from the postal service to come to Watsonville, at least to discuss with an architect what the building will look like and how it will be constructed.