

plant corn yesterday in the garden. I plan to plant the rest of the seeds.

✓CF Watsonville - Growth REP 3/11/92 p.11

# Traffic plan raising some hackles

By CHELA ZABIN

STAFF WRITER

City staff and some members of the Watsonville City Council aren't too pleased with portions of a state-mandated plan to reduce traffic congestion.

The plan is being put together by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission and has several components, including review of new development, a traffic-reduction ordinance requiring employers to reduce their employees' driving, and monitoring key intersections. The plan is a requirement of Proposition 111, which was passed in 1990 and raised the gas tax for transportation projects.

"It's a little bit more than take two Dristan and carpool," said Watsonville principal planner Charles Eadie as he presented the staff's analysis of the plan.

"We're not against the Congestion Management Plan concept," he said.

What the staff objects to, he said, are some of the specifics. Some of the proposals appear to be at odds with what the city is trying to do — such as the making parking difficult to encourage al-

ternative transportation when the city wants to revitalize local businesses.

An extensive memo prepared by the city's planning and public works departments on the plan had been presented to the council, and Eadie outlined the staff's major objections.

One of those, Eadie said, is the size of proposed projects that would be subject to review — those that generate 50 trips or more during the peak afternoon hours. Projects that fall into that category would include a 3,000-square-foot grocery store, a gas station, a 2,500-square-foot bank, a 50-unit subdivision and a 2,780-square-foot restaurant.

"We feel that this is a review threshold that is entirely too low," he said. By comparison, he said, Sonoma County has chosen a threshold of 500 trips and Santa Clara County 100 trips. City staff suggests 200 trips.

Some of the projects the city can now process quickly, without a full environmental impact report, would have to be reviewed by the commission under this rule. That would mean more time and money from people who want to build.

Eadie also took issue with the plan's requirement that all the impacts of a new development on traffic be "fully mitigated, including the funding of needed transportation projects and programs."

"We don't think that's possible," he said.

Eadie said no other standard, including those set up by federal environmental law, is so strict. What's required by the environmental law is reduction of significant negative impacts to a "less than significant level." Environmental law also allows a jurisdiction to balance a new development's benefits against its negative impacts, when approving a project, while the congestion management plan makes no such allowance.

Eadie said the plan was confusing because it says the rules are a "set of guiding principals," but if the city doesn't conform to them, it stands to lose the state gas-tax money. It's not clear, Eadie said, how the city will be judged on its conformance with the plan.

Several council members echoed Eadie's statements, saying that while they agreed with the

plan's goals, they found the methods for achieving them too restrictive, too costly, and in some cases, at odds with city plans. They also worried about loss of local control.

"No one can argue with the desire to manage congestion," said Councilman Lowell Hurst. "It's the methodology that might be used to enforce some of those standards."

But Councilman Todd McFarren said, "I don't think we need to be overly alarmist about the intention of the (Congestion Management Plan)."

He said some details of the plan do need to be worked on, but that the overall concept was approved by voters, and that regional solutions to problems are the way of the future. He urged the council to proceed in a "spirit of cooperation" with the transportation commission, rather than setting itself up as an adversary.

The council voted to send city staff's comments to the transportation commission, which has extended the deadline for public comment to April 2, and to set up a subcommittee of council members, staff members and business people to review the plan in detail and bring its comments to the council.