

Watsonville - General RP 1/29/92 p. 11

# Watsonville grapples with ways to reduce water use within city

By CHELA ZABIN  
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville's City Council last night struggled to find a way to cut water use that would not jeopardize housing development or unfairly burden water users.

The city hopes to cut water use by 15.6 percent and to compensate fully for water demand from new housing. That amount has been determined to be the city's "share" of the overdraft in the Pajaro Valley. An overdraft means that more water is being taken out than is going back into the ground-water supply.

Water use within the city limits amounts to about 9.8 percent of the water used in the valley.

City staff thinks the 15.6 percent savings could be achieved voluntarily through a strong education program and with incentives, such as a rebate for people who install water-saving devices in their homes.

Although the details of a water conservation program weren't spelled out last night, staff said funds would have to be raised to pay for it. They proposed two methods for doing so: Charge developers a fee of \$354 per bedroom and increase residential water rates by \$1.96 per month for the average user; or raise rates by \$2.68 for the average user and not charge developers.

Staff said that either way, Watsonville's rates would still be below the average for rates and connection fees in nearby water jurisdictions. Commercial and industrial users would not be included in this increase.

The staff also suggested "block rates" as a way to discourage use. Under this plan, per-gallon rates would increase with higher use.

The council seemed split philosophically over whether new development should have to pay for its additional demand.

"I don't think we should put everything on the new builders," Councilman Al Alcalá said.

"There are enough fees," Councilwoman Betty Bobeda said.

They, along with Councilman Tony Campos, said they didn't want to discourage housing development by adding fees to what the city already charges.

But Councilman Lowell Hurst said he didn't think those fees would make much difference in housing costs. And Councilman Todd McFarren said that charging all water users for the increased demand would be "subsidizing developers."

McFarren also noted that city water users had already voluntarily cut back consumption by about 10 percent over the past three years. He said he hoped that would be figured into any plan for further reduction.

In the end, the council asked staff to return with something that would represent a middle ground.

Staff members, responding to questions from the council, said various ways to get and retain more water are being explored by the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency.

In another water-conservation matter, the council unanimously approved an ordinance that prohibits wasting water.

John McGuire, the city's water director, said last night that although the city already had an ordinance prohibiting wasting water, it is "ambiguous."

"This ordinance does define it pretty precisely," he said.

The ordinance requires the repair of leaking plumbing, sprinkler and irrigation systems. It prohibits using a hose to wash vehicles unless it is equipped with an automatic shut-off nozzle, cleaning sidewalk or driveways with a hose, allowing run-off or spillage of water and using non-recycling fountains, among other things.

Violators will be issued a written warning. Water service can be turned off if the violation isn't corrected.