

Council hunts ways to increase revenue

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

Bicycle, dog and garage-sale licenses were scrutinized last night as examples of fees that could be raised or better enforced to bring more nickels and dimes into Watsonville's empty coffers.

The City Council, reviewing budget matters in the first in a series of study sessions, is contending with the fact that the outlook for city services is bleak unless some way is found to raise revenues. The \$36.7 million proposed budget for 1988-89 is balanced only by depleting reserves and trimming \$1 million from various city departments to compensate for a projected \$1.15 million deficit, City Manager John Radin wrote in his introduction to the budget.

The city cannot continue operating at its present level without an influx of funds, he told the council. Unless the economy improves and the city's sales-tax base increases, or revenues are raised through such means as assessment districts, bond issues or utility-user taxes, he said, "next year, you're going to be cutting personnel."

Mayor Betty Murphy took exception to Radin's written remark that "our unheeded warnings over the past two years that balancing the budget from reserves is imprudent, now has caught up with us."

"If it was as imprudent as you say, maybe we should have been flagged sooner or something," the mayor said. She referred specifically to the purchase of two downtown lots for parking and raises for employees.

However, Radin pointed out

that the lots were purchased with redevelopment monies and did not come out of the general fund.

Other council members said they'd seen tough times ahead.

Murphy made it clear that one across-the-board department expense she intends to examine is the travel-expense fund. She questioned the amount penciled in for travel in three of four departmental budgets reviewed last night: \$5,400 for

Radin said another possibility for more revenue is a larger city share of court fines, including drunk-driving and other misdemeanor tickets.

the mayor and City Council, \$2,950 for the city manager and \$2,500 for other personnel.

She also proposed raising the city's bicycle- and dog-license fees, and charges for impoundment at the city pound.

Councilman Rex Clark questioned the \$1,500 budgeted as revenue from the city's \$5 garage-sale licenses.

"I see \$1,500 worth of garage sales every weekend," he said.

Police Chief Ray Belgard said officers only stop at sites of repeated sales to check the premises for licenses.

Murphy and Clark asked for better enforcement where possible; signs in fluorescent paint might make them more visible to officers, Clark said.

Radin said another possibility

for more revenue is a larger city share of court fines, including drunk-driving and other misdemeanor tickets. Of \$25,000 budgeted for 1987-88, only \$8,000 has been received in that fund.

Radin said he is meeting with other Santa Cruz County city managers seeking a larger share of the fines, which are split with the county, "because we're finding out that the more tickets we issue, the less money we're getting."

Overdue fines on library books were another area Murphy asked staff to check, and Councilman Vido Deretich spoke against a proposed raise for council members, from the current \$50 to \$300 a month.

"It's not a good way to run a business; you're running backwards and you give yourself a raise," he said.

Deretich also suggested cutting down on the amount of paper used at City Hall.

"There's a million memos around here that got no use for nothing ... We're burning up a tree a day around here," he said.

The council set its next study session for May 26 on the topic of capital improvement and Public Works projects, including engineering, streets, street-cleaning and storm drains.

Presentations of funding requests from social-service agencies were tentatively set for a June 9 meeting, with June 14 targeted for a public hearing on the budget.

Sixteen social-service agencies are seeking \$182,491; requests totaled \$170,913 last year, when \$50,000 was approved for division among six agencies.