

Murphy calls for curbs on city manager's power

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

The way Watsonville City Manager John Radin does his job has prompted charges that the city manager position has become too powerful.

Mayor Betty Murphy said Radin assumes too much power, has a hard time working with a woman mayor and oversteps his job responsibilities by telling the council what to do, rather than giving the council the information it needs to make decisions on its own.

The city-manager form of government was created to do away with the nepotism and political manipulation that flourished under the old ward system, she said. An appointed city manager who dictates orders to an elected council simply represents a transfer of that political power, she said.

Councilman Dennis Osmer called for a personnel session with Radin, scheduled for Feb. 14, during a discussion at Tuesday's council meeting of a street-improvement bond issue proposed for the May 9 ballot. Osmer railed against a lack of information in the council's packet on the street improvements and laid the blame on Radin.

"I'm feeling like the staff's



John Radin

treating the council like some type of fungus," Osmer said at the time.

In expanding on his comments this morning, Osmer said Radin has made too many mistakes and has failed to give the council enough information too many times in the last six months or so, and he wants some answers.

"This is not an isolated incident," Osmer said. "This is part of a trend."

Radin declined this morning

to respond to Osmer's comments. Referring to the fact that the personnel session would be closed to the public, Radin said it would make no sense for him to respond to Osmer's charges in the newspaper.

"He (Osmer) called for a closed session, so there's no comment," Radin said.

Murphy agreed mistakes and a lack of information have occurred and said Radin has too much to do and needs help, but has a hard time delegating responsibility. She's been saying for years the city needs a fulltime assistant city manager, she said, and she intends to repeat that at the personnel session.

Finance Director Chuck Comstock carries that title, "but he's got his hands full with finance," Murphy said.

However, Murphy said the real problem is that Radin holds too much power. She has already taken some steps to force him to relinquish some of that power, she said, and she intends to continue.

Several months ago, she directed City Clerk Lorraine Washington to begin reading resolutions before they're voted on by the council, Murphy said.

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Radin used to do that, but Murphy said she discovered that the charter gives that responsibility to the city clerk. Also, about a year ago, she directed Washington rather than Radin to call the roll, she said.

Murphy was sick and so could not attend Tuesday's council meeting, but she had planned another change which she said she would put into effect at the next meeting. The change is to direct Washington to take a seat alongside the council, next to Radin and City Attorney Don Haile.

Washington now sits alone at a table in front of and below the council, but Murphy said her rightful place is beside the council.

"I know these things may seem very minute," Murphy said, "but they're symbolic."

In many ways, the city clerk, who keeps minutes of the meet-

ings and the city's records, is "the heart of city government under the city-manager government," Murphy said, and she wants to make sure the city-clerk position retains all its power.

Murphy also said she thinks the mayor and the council should have more power. Although Watsonville's charter does not provide for a strong mayoral form of government, certain mayors in the city's past have held more power than others on the force of their personalities, she said.

However, Radin has trouble working with a woman mayor and does not always give her — or the council — adequate information to make decisions, Murphy said.

"I think this is all tied in with (the idea that) staff knows best," she said.

Murphy said Radin infringes on the roles of the council and mayor in other ways as well.

"I think it should be recognized that the mayor is the representative of the city for

other agencies and other political people... John has a tendency to kind of take on that role," she said.

Murphy plans to propose a study of the city's rules and regulations regarding council meetings and the role of the council, with an eye toward making some changes, she said. She and former Mayor Ann Soldo had opposed changes that were made some time ago, suggested by the city attorney and Radin, she said.

"Ann and I both opposed many of those changes because they took a lot of the power away from the mayor," Murphy said.

Now Murphy said she wants to increase the mayor's and the council's power and take away some power from the city manager's position.