

# Watsonville won't pay county for collecting property taxes

There was a minor rebellion at City Hall last night. The City Council, acting as the Watsonville Redevelopment Agency, decided to put off paying one of the bills sent by the county for collection of property taxes.

The agency voted not to pay the \$11,331 the county is charging for collecting property tax within the Redevelopment Agency's project area until city staff checks into the legality of the tax.

The bill is the first the city has received since the passage of a state law that allows counties to charge cities for jail-bookings fees and school districts for property tax collection. In all, the city expects to be billed about \$200,000. Several school districts, including the Pajaro Valley district, and Cabrillo College have refused to pay their bills.

"Is this the bill?" Councilwoman Betty Murphy asked incredulously when the claim was presented to the agency.

"Let's not pay the claim," said Councilman Parr Eves.

City Attorney Luis Hernandez told the agency that there was some question as to whether redevelopment agencies are fair game for the charge.

City Manager Steve Salomon said it doesn't appear that the state is going to take the advice of many California cities, which have suggested that the motor vehicle license fees be continued to generate more money for the counties.

The fees generate an amount roughly equivalent to what the counties are getting from the cities and the cities, many of which are strapped for cash themselves, were suggesting they be substituted for the charges.

Salomon said Gov. Pete Wilson is considering continuing the li-

cense fees but only in concert with taking away more state money from county budgets.

Several cities, as well as the state community colleges board, have brought lawsuits against counties and the state over the charges.

Murphy said she'd heard that counties are getting even more money from the cities and school districts than the state had figured, and Salomon added that Santa Cruz County was among the first in the state to implement all of the charges it was entitled to.

Finance Director Terry Stigall said he had asked the county for backup paperwork on the charge to the redevelopment agency and would be taking a look at exactly how much the county is collecting.

"I personally don't feel comfortable not paying this bill," said Mayor Todd McFarren, suggesting that the agency put off paying the bill while staff checked out the options.

The council will discuss the matter at its next meeting, the day after the bill is due.