

CF Watsonville - Govt & Politics

City balks at paying ^{RP} 2/28/91 P. 1 collection fees to county

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It's not open rebellion yet, but the Watsonville City Council is waver-
ing on paying the charges the
county has imposed for collection
of property taxes and booking peo-
ple arrested in Watsonville into
County Jail.

Finance Director Terry Stigall
told the council at its Tuesday
night meeting that he hadn't yet
paid the \$171,383 the county is de-
manding from the city and that he
was going to meet with the finance
directors from the other cities in
Santa Cruz County to talk about
the charges.

The county decided last fall to
impose the fees as a way to bal-
ance its own budget in the face of
state cutbacks. The state gave
counties the right to charge cities,

school districts and other jurisdic-
tions for property-tax collection
and other services the counties
had performed for free.

Watsonville is charged \$70.99
per person for the booking, or
about \$1,400 a month, Stigall said.
The property-tax collection fees
for the year are \$56,146 for the city
and \$11,311 for the redevelopment
project area in the city.

The council has already decided
not to pay the \$11,311, basing its
decision on the city attorney's
opinion that the law doesn't spec-
ify that the county can charge re-
development agencies.

"I don't think we should pay the
bill blindly," said Councilwoman
Betty Murphy.

Noting that the school districts
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Snow level 4,000 to 5,000 feet.

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and Cabrillo College are refusing
to pay their bills, Murphy said,
"the county must be aware that
some of us are having problems
with it." She said the county al-
ready gets 23 percent of the prop-
erty taxes in the city.

Councilman Lowell Hurst ques-
tioned the cost of the booking fee
and Councilman Oscar Rios asked
if there was any way to avoid
booking so many people.

Police Chief Terry Medina, call-

ing the law that allows counties to
charge for booking "ill-conceived"
and blatantly unfair to the cities
and the public, which already pays
taxes to the county, said there
wasn't. Even people who just get a
ticket are "booked" at some point
in the court process.

"I will not mete out justice in
terms of how much a booking fee
costs if it's something that directly
affects someone's safety," he said.

The council voted unanimously
to hold off paying the bills until
Stigall has had a chance to meet
with the other cities.