

VCF AIRPORTS

# Airport manager job may be axed

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## City's reorganization plan would trim administration

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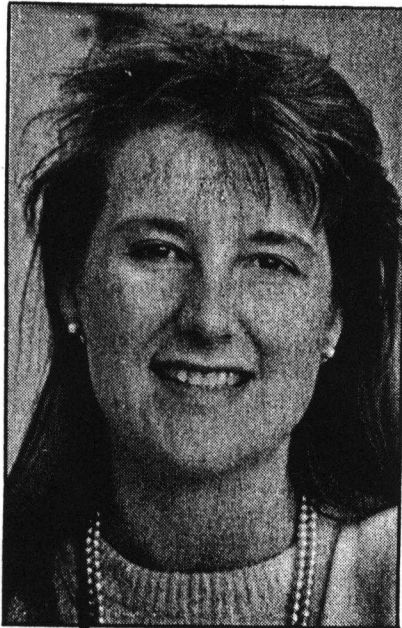
Watsonville's City Manager Steve Salomon is recommending a reorganization of the city's airport administration that would include the removal of Airport Manager Kim Wirht.

Salomon made the recommendation in a memo to the City Council, which is scheduled to discuss the matter at its meeting Tuesday.

In a press conference yesterday afternoon, Salomon said he's proposing the reorganization for financial reasons. Although some questions have been raised in the past about how well the airport has been run, Salomon said Wirht's job performance was not a factor.

A taped message was on the airport phone at 4:45 p.m. yesterday (stating that office hours are a.m. to 5 p.m.), and Wirht could not be reached for comment.

Salomon said his recommendation is in line with the city's desire to make sure that certain operations, like the airport, truly pay their own way. Along those lines, the council has required that those operations, which include



~~KIM WIRHT~~  
Job may be eliminated

the solid waste and waste water divisions and are called "enterprise funds," pay a portion of certain expenses shared by all the city departments. Those expenses include things like insurance, data

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processing and administrative services, and work done in the personnel and finance departments.

The airport has just begun paying for those things, but according to some calculations done by Finance Director Eric Frost, it can't afford to. If the airport had been required to pay for them, Frost figured, it would have, over the last eight years, had an annual deficit of \$73,000.

Along with the elimination of the airport manager position, Salomon is recommending that the city proceed with the purchase of a self-fueling island for pilots. The fueling station was approved by the council some time back as a way to increase revenues — fuel would be available to pilots for more hours — and decrease expenditures, as two jobs at the airport could be eliminated. Between the two, Salomon said the airport's bottom line will be raised by \$100,000 a year.

Salomon said he also thinks the airport should pay more in depreciation costs than Frost figured. A fairer amount, he said, should be 30 percent, rather than 10 percent. (Frost had figured 10 percent, because the Federal Aviation Administration pays 90 percent of nearly all of the airport's capital expenditures.) With the 30 percent set aside, the airport would need the total \$100,000 to break even, Salomon said.

The city manager is recommending that Assistant City Manager and Fire Chief Gary Smith be responsible for overseeing the management of the airport, with the help of Assistant Fire Chief Don French, the finance and public works department staff and the airport personnel. Currently, there are four full-time permanent employees in addition to Wirht, and two temporary positions. The temporary positions would be eliminated.

He suggests that the finance department "take clear responsibility for the management of all items relating to leases...as well as for the management of the hangars." Salomon said doing so would provide for "appropriate annual changes in the lease rates" and the likelihood that airport lease and rental rates "are tied to the market."

He also recommends that the management and financial status of the airport be monitored quarterly to keep an eye on whether the changes have made a difference.

Salomon said he will also recommend that an advisory committee on the airport be set up to make suggestions on how the airport might better be run.

The matter is scheduled for the council's 7:30 p.m. meeting.