

Living-wage ordinance one step closer to reality in Watsonville

Living wage
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The City Council gave an initial thumbs up to a living-wage ordinance this week.

If it receives final approval next month, the ordinance would affect all for-profit businesses that provide goods or services to the

WATSONVILLE city under contracts of more than \$10,000.

Those contractors would be required to pay employees \$11.50 per hour with benefits or \$12.55 without for hours spent working on a city contract. Service contracts on projects with Redevelopment Agency funding of more than \$10,000 also would be affected. New contractors would have to make an effort to offer jobs to employees of a prior contractor if the city changed contractors for any project more than \$50,000.

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Antonio Rivas, a 20-year city resident, was pleased with the council's action.

"As an educator, I've seen how expensive it is for families here," Rivas said. "A living wage means being able to afford a place to live ... and it means not having to choose between school supplies and groceries."

But Dave Bolick, Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce president, has said the move would quash competition and cost the city more, since businesses not willing or able to offer increased wages would be taken out of the running for city contracts.

In a split decision, the council decided that a seven-member community advisory committee, not the city manager, would oversee the implementation and operation of the ordinance, hear grievances and make recommendations to the council.

Nonprofit, social service and community service businesses will not be affected by the ordinance. Neither would businesses with fewer than five employees, among others. Temporary city employees also would not be covered.

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