

# Watsonville voters asked to pass tax to support police

By STEVE STROTH  
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville voters will get a chance in June to decide if they want to be taxed \$3 a month to help pay for more police officers.

The City Council Tuesday night put a tax proposal on the June ballot that, if approved by two-thirds of the voters, would generate about \$300,000 — enough to hire at least seven new police officers.

Several council members weren't too sure about the proposal's chances, but Councilman Joe Marsano came up with the idea as one way to get more police officers out on the streets.

"There's a concern in the community over the growing crime," Marsano said. (According to the Police Department's monthly activity

report for October, reported crimes were up 61 percent over October of last year.)

Marsano reminded the council that many citizens, including two prominent community groups, came before the council while it was preparing its budget in July to ask that the city hire more police officers. The council only approved two new officers despite support from community leaders for Police Chief Ray Belgard's request for nine more officers.

If Marsano's tax proposal is approved by the voters in the June 3 election, it would mean each of the city's dwelling units would be charged \$3 a month along with the normal water billings. Commercial tenants would be charged \$10 a month and industrial companies \$15 a month.

Those charges would be subject to annual adjustments keyed to the Consumer Price Index.

"Well, at least it's distributed evenly," Councilman Roy Ingersoll said.

Anyone with a city water connection will begin paying the tax for the new police officers July 1, if the proposal is approved.

But several council members don't expect Watsonville residents to buy into the proposal.

"I don't think it's going to pass, but I'm not against putting it on the ballot," Councilman Vido Deretich said.

"I think we should at least give people a chance to vote," Councilman Marsano said.

Mayor Ann Soldo and Councilwoman Betty Murphy voted against putting the proposal on the ballot.

"I don't know why we should

have to tax for public safety," Mayor Soldo said. "People expect the city to (provide those services)."

Soldo said that the council has been adding police personnel every year since 1982. If the council wants more police officers, it should find money in the budget to pay for them without levying a special tax, she said.

The council will pass its 1986-87 budget in July, the same month the tax would go into effect if it was passed.

Also at this week's meeting, the council postponed raising a number of city service fees until a study session is held in January.

Councilman Rex Clark said the numerous fees — which include charges for such services as building permits, airport rental space, water connections and garbage collection — should be studied more carefully by the council before it approves them.

"We have to be careful," Clark said. "If we keep raising fees, we could get a Prop. 13 that says we can't raise fees anymore."

The council didn't set a date for a study session, but it will hold a public hearing on the numerous fee increases at its Jan. 28 meeting.