

Watsonville's destiny on hold

By JAMIE MARKS
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — This is the day political history was to have been made in Watsonville.

It was the day the first election was to be held under a court-ordered system of district voting designed to boost Latino representation on the City Council.

But that was before a violent, 15-second earthquake struck at 5:04 p.m. on Oct. 17.

So the history that was made this autumn in this largely Latino city was not electoral. It was of a disaster. It ravaged the downtown and shook 1,200 people out of their homes and into the parks, where many still live under tents.

The election will still be held, albeit a month later, on Dec. 5. It will seat at least five new council members out of a seven-member body, which is in itself a major change for this town.

But 1,200 of the town's 30,000 residents are displaced by the earthquake, and getting them to turn their attention to the election may be as difficult as finding them.

Many people will not be home to receive their ballots. Many do not have homes to return to. And some have left the area.

The earthquake turned the town's critical housing shortage into a nightmare. With 465 people still living in emergency shelters as of Sunday night, the city is

facing a monumental housing crisis as it scrambles to find more permanent housing for the farmworkers and frozen-food workers displaced by the quake.

Cruz Gomez, a community activist and one of three plaintiffs who sued the city in 1985 to force the district system of voting said the earthquake may have brought a positive side to the housing crisis.

"It's exacerbated the need for housing, but for the candidates that have been 100 percent for affordable housing, maybe

they're a little more hopeful that there will be planning, development and actual funding for the housing we need," Gomez said.

"It's a hopeful note in this election," she said.

"Negatively, my voters are scattered and the quake has definitely had a negative impact in my district, where many homes were lost," she said.

The quake has diverted attention away from other issues, which may or may not get aired, she said. None of the candidates' forums have been rescheduled.

"I see this emergency type of situation we're in hopefully coming to a manageable level by next week," Gomez said. "Hopefully the city is doing the same. Possibly then they can focus on the elections, and maybe the candidates will, too."

Mayor Betty Murphy, another

candidate and a staunch opponent of district elections, said, "The issues are pretty much the same, but they're more intensified."

"The issues are still housing, the downtown, and the future of the city," Murphy said. "This earthquake has made all those problems come to everybody's attention, and it's going to make it harder for the city to work without a lot of cooperation from Monterey and Santa Cruz counties."

"Watsonville cannot be held responsible for all the housing in the Pajaro Valley," Murphy said.

Parr Eves, another candidate,

said the affordable housing issue has "boomeranged and magnified" since the earthquake.

"It may be three to five years before we get the downtown situation in hand. As a small businessman, I hate to say this, but I think businessmen can always find a way to come back."

"But it hopefully won't be that long for housing, which is a people situation," Eves said. "I've heard the planning director say downtown should become partly residential. We may have to change our thinking on downtown."

Pajaro levee repair starts

By JAMIE MARKS
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WATSONVILLE — The reconstruction of a nearly mile-long section of the earthquake-damaged Pajaro River levee from Watsonville to the Pacific Ocean began Monday.

The 7.1 earthquake ripped apart segments of the levee, creating

Granite Construction Co. of Watsonville under the auspices of the Corps of Engineers. It will cost approximately \$1 million to repair, with the work expected to be wrapped up in a month, Guelden said.

"We must work quickly to repair that damage," said John Azeveda, the corps' resident engineer.

"The levee cracks are very

runs from the Riversic bridge, through Watsonville rivermouth.

In addition, the repair will include three sites along C Creek, which feeds into the River.

Many of the cracks go so, to the water line. Guelden said the corps will have to dig the line, clear it out and reconstruct it.