

# Watsonville receives waiver for sewage plant

**WATSONVILLE** — The city received a tentative waiver for its sewage-treatment plant from the Environmental Protection Agency Monday.

The decision means that unless the EPA changes its mind, Watsonville will be able to operate its new \$21.5 million plant as an advanced primary sewage-treatment facility for the next five years, without having to immediately worry about finding financing for the more expensive secondary treatment.

The new facility is under construction to bring it from primary treatment to the more complex form of treatment known as advanced primary and is expected to be completed by early next winter. It is being financed largely from federal grants, which are paying 87.5 percent of the cost of construction.

Assistant Public Works Director David Koch said a final EPA decision may still be six months off because of procedural steps that have to be taken.

The EPA will meet with the staff of the Regional Water Quality Control Board to come up with wastewater discharge requirements which the city will review. Then the matter will be heard at a joint meeting of the water board and EPA, after which time a final decision will be made.

In the meantime, anyone who wants can appeal the EPA's tentative decision, said Koch.

Several contingencies are attached to the EPA's tentative approval. They include requirements that the city:

- disinfect its effluent. Koch said this will be done by chlorination;

- demonstrate the facility is able to remove 30 percent of the biochemical oxygen demand. BOD is an "indirect measurement of the organic contaminants in the water," said Koch, adding he thinks the upgraded facility will reach 75 percent removal;

- satisfy all state and federal clean-water standards;

- finish the ocean outfall line. Koch said the 4,000-foot outfall is being expanded another 4,000 feet and will be completed by the time the final decision is due.

In addition, the city will have to monitor the ocean water to make sure there aren't any major changes in the local flora and fauna. The monitoring program will cost the city approximately \$300,000 a year, said Koch.

Vice Mayor Vido Deretich said he was "glad we got it. It will buy us some time, but my personal opinion is we'll have to go to secondary treatment down the road."