

Board gives city wide berth on senior dispute

The Board of Supervisors decided today to steer clear of the fight over guidelines for the operation of the planned Watsonville Senior Center.

Pajaro Valley Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. asked his fellow supervisors to declare their firm support for the guidelines unanimously approved by the City Council last month and to "reaffirm" their support for the senior center, soon to be built at Main and Rodriguez streets.

Moore's efforts to get the board to take those actions were triggered by threats by Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) not to participate in the new senior center unless guidelines acceptable to FNS are adopted.

FNS coordinator Sam Karp, supported by his board of directors, has pressed for guidelines that would be more weighted toward assuring full participation by minority and low-income seniors. Among other things, FNS has insisted that all staff members at the new center be bilingual.

But the City Council unanimously adopted guidelines that did not measure up to the demands of FNS. Because FNS is the agency that — through its Golden Age Nutrition Program — serves hot meals at nominal cost to seniors, its participation has been considered vital to providing full services at the center.

But FNS is taking steps that could lead to the operation of a sort of "alternate senior center" just down Main Street from where the new center is to be built. FNS proposes turning the building at 1035 Main St., where it now has offices, into a "multi-purpose senior center," where, among other things, its Golden Age Nutrition Program would be carried out.

All this came before the board today because FNS has indicated it will ask the board to allocate \$16,450 for rent and utilities for the first year of operation of the "alternate"

senior center. Any such approval would almost certainly lead to the establishment of competing centers in the city.

Moore, whose admittedly libertarian-conservative instincts were aroused by the FNS demands, asked the board today to support his resolution as its way of showing support for the unanimous action of the City Council and for the "near-unanimity" of the citizens of Watsonville in opposition to the FNS "racial quota" demands.

But Supervisors Robley Levy, Dan Forbus and Joe Cucchiara (Gary Patton was absent) indicated that, while they may have differing views individually on the matter, they did not believe the board should be interfering in the details.

Cucchiara, who represents the San Lorenzo Valley-Scotts Valley area, pointed out that the county's participation was limited to putting up \$50,000 toward the senior center's construction, that a contract had already been signed to that effect and that the board had already supported other recommended guidelines — and that should be that.

Midcounty Supervisor Levy agreed, and so did Forbus, although the latter made it clear his philosophical sympathies accorded with those of Moore in the matter. Cucchiara, on the other hand, said that while he believed the county should take no further action, he felt that the "facts" that Moore gave in support of his position were open to challenge.

Cucchiara noted that other agencies besides FNS had threatened not to take part in the new senior-center activities unless the guidelines were made more specific in regard to services for minorities. These include, he said, the Senior Citizens Legal Services and Sunrise Senior Services. To which Moore replied that those community-service agencies have "few constituents" in Watsonville and that their purpose "as I see it" is not constructive.

The verbal exchanges were significant only if they portend what the board will do when the FNS request for the \$16,450 comes before it. It is virtually certain that Forbus will join Moore in opposition to the request and a matter of guesswork as to what the other three supervisors will do.