

Mayor: Jobs needed for health of city

By LANE WALLACE

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WATSONVILLE — Providing new jobs is crucial for the future economic health of the city, Mayor Bobeda said in her "State of the City" address yesterday at Rancho Grande restaurant.

Unless there are jobs for the young people, "in 15 years these chairs will be empty," Bobeda told 40 people at the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce Hispanic Business Committee's lunch.

"Is it acceptable for the agricultural community to continue to grow and prosper and the environmental community to continue to constrain the city on all sides when an increasingly Latino population which serves the agricultural industry suffers with inadequate schools, inadequate parks and unacceptable employment?" Bobeda said. "It's my firm belief that the answer is no."

If the city is to be successful in these efforts, Bobeda said, it needs help from the business community when issues come up.

A key issue, Bobeda said, is an application to "prezone" 216 acres on farm land on the west side so an industrial park can be built.

The City Council is split on the matter, which will come up again within two months.

"There always seems to be a reason to do nothing or to be against things, but the do-nothing alternative which we have been forced to follow for 20 years has created massive suffering in this community," Bobeda said.

Bobeda said after the meeting that she was referring to a long list of government regulations that the city has had to follow, and was not blaming anybody.

The city has made "significant accomplishments" in bringing new jobs to the city, Bobeda said, but they don't make up for the "massive dependency" the city had on the frozen-food industry, where several thousand jobs have been lost in the last decade.

The city's unemployment rate is 20 percent, far above the rest of Santa Cruz County.

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Bobeda said the city is working with Dean Foods, which closed the old Norcal Crosetti vegetable-packing plant last week, to re-use the building for cold storage, seafood processing and additional processing for Dean Foods. Also involved is Cascade Refrigerated, which bought the building from Dean.

Bobeda said the city is working with a number of companies that are expanding.

Expanding companies include California Environmental Technology, which is constructing a new building on Aviation Way, Sakata Pallets and Cardboard Box Assembly, which is building on Riverside Drive, and West Marine, which is converting its warehouse space to office space. Part of the warehouse will be leased to other firms. West Marine is moving its warehouse to Hollister.

Bobeda said Sierra Therm, which makes furnaces for the computer industry, will build a 20,000-square-foot building in Westridge Business Park and double its current work force of 40 at its Hangar Way plant. (See related story page 2.)

Also planning to locate in Watsonville are Orion Telescope (on Hangar Way), and California Tube Laboratories, which will move from Live Oak to a building the city will build at the airport.