

Fluoridation opponents garner 2,239 signatures, plan November ballot measure

By **KAREN A. DAVIS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

More than 2,200 signatures have been collected by members of **WATSONVILLE** Watsonville Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, a group that opposes fluoridation.

They only needed 1,200 to put the issue to a public vote in November.

The group now plans to mount a public education campaign "to inform folks about this form of mass medication," said group spokesman Dan

Hernandez.

Last month, the City Council accepted a nearly \$1 million grant to fund the installation of fluoridation treatment equipment and cover operations and maintenance costs for one year. The grant was provided by the Fluoridation 2010 Work Group, a collaboration of several state and national dental-health agencies.

According to the state Department of Health Services, the city must fluoridate within two years now that it has received the funding. Still, opponents, who claim ingested fluoride does not cure dental problems, say state law has not been

challenged by a charter city such as Watsonville.

In February 2000, state Attorney General Bill Lockyer said, "With respect to a charter city that has an ordinance prohibiting the fluoridation of the city's water supply, state law requiring the fluoridation of public water systems supersedes the city's ordinance when outside funds are made available to install and operate a system."

Last week, the council approved an agreement with an engineering firm to develop final, construction-level plans for the system. The system could be implemented by spring 2003, according

to David Koch, public works director.

Councilwoman Judy Doering-Nielsen has voted against issues involving fluoridation.

"While I recognize there is a state mandate to have fluoridated water if funds are available, it has not been challenged and there is still a chance for the city to postpone this," Doering-Nielsen said.

Doering-Nielsen and Mayor Betty Bobeda cast votes against it.

Contact Karen A. Davis at kdavis@santa-cruz.com.