

# Watsonville police tax fails

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A majority of Watsonville voters approved the police tax Measure B in yesterday's election, but the tally fell short of the two-thirds majority required to eventually put more police officers on the streets.

The measure got 2,037 "yes" votes (50.6 percent) and 1,988 "no" votes (49.4 percent). With that number of voters, the measure needed 2,683 votes (66.6 percent) to pass.

Since the passage of Proposition 13, the 1978 property-tax initiative, all tax proposals must get the approval of at least two-thirds of the voters.

Councilwoman Betty Murphy, who campaigned against the measure despite heavy support from other city officials and civic leaders, said this morning she was happy it didn't get enough votes.

"I'm glad ... that people won't have another bill to pay," she said.

Had the measure passed, a \$3 charge per month would have been added to each residential water bill to pay for more officers. Commercial businesses would have paid \$10 a month and industrial tenants \$15. The tax would have been in effect for three years.

Murphy said the city's residents pay enough taxes already. It is the job of the city to work with the money it has, she said.

"We've tried to keep clear of extra taxes on people," Murphy said. "I'd hate to see Watsonville get into that."

Without the \$300,000 the tax

would have raised each year, the burden of meeting staffing shortages in the Police Department falls on the shoulders of the City Council, which will be reviewing its 1986-87 budget this month.

"This puts pressure on us to see if we can hire more police," Murphy said.

The election results came as a disappointment to civic leaders and police administrators, who claimed the city's shortage of revenues this year would prevent any new police officers from being hired.

"I don't know what I'm going to do now," Police Chief Ray Belgard said this morning. "We definitely need that personnel."

Belgard said he currently has just 23 patrol officers in the 42-person department, which means no more than four officers are on the streets at any given time.

"I think it (the election results) tells you what people expect of the service," Belgard said, implying that not enough voters want more police protection.

"But it (Measure B) went down, and now we're going to see what we can do to keep up the level of service," he said.

Councilwoman Murphy and Mayor Ann Soldo campaigned against the measure arguing that the city's residents shouldn't be taxed for something the city already collects taxes for.

"The mayor and Council member Murphy certainly believe the (existing) tax money should add that person-

nel," Belgard said. "But I don't know where the money is going to come from. I think that's a little naive on their part, and I think (their opposition) had something to do with the results."

Dennis Osmer, a community volunteer who helped organize a committee to pass the measure, said this morning the battle to get more police isn't over.

"I still think there is a need," he said. "I hope the City Council reconsiders putting (more police) into the budget."

Osmer also called for Mayor Soldo to keep her promise to fight for more police during the coming budget hearings.

But that should prove to be difficult. Because of declining revenues, City Manager John Radin has already recommended two vacant police officer jobs be eliminated to save money.

Measure C, the only other city issue on the ballot, was approved by a comfortable margin, 2,743 to 1,043.

With 75 percent of the voters approving the measure, city staffers can now grant Public Works Department contracts for jobs costing less than \$50,000 without City Council approval.

Staffers must still solicit bids for each project, but can now choose the lowest responsible bidder themselves rather than getting council approval. City officials say the procedural change, which now brings Watsonville in line with the process used by most other cities, will save staff time and money.