

Betty Murphy bids goodbye to Watsonville City Council

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WATSONVILLE — Back in 1979, apples were still king, the top-valued crop in the county worth \$22.8 million and covering 6,822 acres, mostly throughout Watsonville. Political newcomer Betty Murphy also won election to the Watsonville City Council that year.

Today, apples have long since dropped from the top spot, being replaced by strawberries, lettuce and cut flowers. Yet, apples still are the most visible crop in Watsonville, covering 4,650 acres.

Like apples, Councilwoman Mur-

phy is still very visible today. She's put in 12 years on the City Council, including a term as mayor.

But Murphy won't be in her familiar right-side seat in the council chamber come Tuesday. She's stepping down after deciding not to run for re-election in her Brewington-Martinelli District 6.

The 68-year-old Murphy plans to spend more time with her husband, Bill — also a former mayor of Watsonville, who served on the council for 14 years, until 1971 — as well as their five grown children and their grandchildren.

"My oldest son told me, 'Mom, now you can learn to cook,'" Mur-

phy said, about her decision to step down.

"I've loved being on the council," she said. "Where else in the world can you give an opinionated woman a captive audience?"

"I still think being on the council is interesting and a challenge, but I've been around since George came home to Martha," she said. "I'm old, but I'm not tired."

Murphy is lauded by her colleagues on the council. They point to her knowledge of issues and willingness to work with them. Two-term Mayor Todd McFarren,

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Betty Murphy

Loved her 'captive audience'

Murphy

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who will be stepping down Tuesday night, described Murphy's leaving a "significant loss."

"Betty not only brought a sense of historical continuity and a deep sense of background to a lot of issues, but always helped to see those issues get solved," McFarren said. "Aside from that knowledge, her personality is going to be sorely missed."

"She'd get in there and fight for what she believed in," McFarren added. "But she also never carried a grudge. When you worked with Betty, you always knew you were getting Betty and not someone else."

Murphy has a reputation for being both stubborn and compassionate — commodities that most politicians would kill for. She's also a stickler for details, taking pride in her knowledge of the city charter and development standards.

Murphy conceded that her "one strength" is her "grasp of overall issues." At one time or another, she has represented Watsonville on the Local Agency Formation Commission, county Transportation Commission, Senior Advisory Commission, Cultural Commission and Hazardous Materials Commission, to name a few.

Murphy has also been on the City Council through many important events, including the divisive cannery strike, redistricting controversy and the earthquake.

She has provided much-needed experience and perspective to the

relatively inexperienced council. No remaining council member has more than 2½ years experience.

But Murphy is confident the new council will do fine. "They latched onto city business very quickly," she said, pointing to 1989 when five new council members joined her. "They certainly got the hang of it quicker than I did in 1979."

At the same time, Murphy hopes the new council "won't try to re-invent the wheel." She wants them to make use of lessons past councils have already learned.

Yet, she also senses a "new direction" coming from her fellow council members.

"I see them moving toward the lowering of development standards in the name of affordable housing," she said. "That disturbs me. Residents want assurances that streets are going to be wide enough, that there's sufficient parking and that overall standards (will) be kept high."

As for the council having three Latino council members serve at once — for the first time in Watsonville's 123-year history — Murphy feels it's a benefit for the council to be representative of the community.

However, she added, "Frankly, I think if we hadn't gone to district elections, we would have had three Latinos get elected (to the council) in May 1989. We had three seats open, with four of the seven candidates Latino."