

Fireworks at city council

Shouting match erupts over planner's post

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The job of the man who oversees Watsonville's housing rehabilitation programs was eliminated last night in a session where the city manager cut off the planning director, the mayor told the planning director he was out of order, and two City Council candidates in the audience shouted that the city manager was out of order.

After the angry exchanges were over, the council voted 4-1, with Dennis Osmer dissenting and Rex Clark and Vido Deretich declining to vote, to uphold City Manager John Radin's recommendation to eliminate the job of Assistant Planning Director Doug Spinelli for lack of funding.

Spinelli spends half his time overseeing the city's housing rehabilitation programs, and half his \$47,388 annual salary came from a \$600,000 federal Community Development Block Grant. That grant expires Sept. 30, and other cities beat out Watsonville for the limited number of new grants available.

The city gets another \$270,000 in state and federal money for housing rehabilitation, but there is no money for administration in those grants - the city must pick up the tab for that.

Radin suggested eliminating Spinelli's position, while retaining two staff members who work on the rehabilitation programs, which provide low-interest loans for fixing up low-income housing.

Planning Director Bud Carney made a plea to retain Spinelli's position, saying that eliminating it would be "seriously jeopardizing" the city's ability to get other housing grants. Carney said the city's recent receipt of \$150,000 in federal housing rehabilitation funds, without applying for them, was a mark of how well other programs have worked in Watsonville. Carney suggested an open position in the planning department not be filled so Spinelli's job could be saved.

Carney said eliminating the assistant planning director position would be sending a signal to the state and federal governments "that Watsonville is not committed to housing...that we don't care about the low-income people."

After Carney had talked for five minutes, Radin cut him off. From the back of the room, City Council candidates Robert Chacanaca and Parr Eves called out "You're out of order" to Radin as Mayor Betty Murphy tried to regain or-

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der.

Murphy criticized Carney for making a threat about the city's rehabilitation programs, and when Carney objected, Murphy angrily shouted, "You're out of order."

To Carney's suggestion that there wouldn't be sufficient staff to handle the program, Murphy told Carney he could handle some matters himself. Carney was assistant planning director before being promoted five years ago.

Osmer, who had unsuccessfully argued to have some aspects of the matter discussed in a closed personnel session, complained that the council was considering issues based on who brought them up, rather than on the merits of the case.

Clark said the matter was in the hands of the city manager and didn't need to come to the council, and Deretich said he agreed with Clark.

Spinelli's name was never mentioned during the discussion - it was always by title. Spinelli, who was present, declined comment after the meeting, other than to thank the council for giving him the opportunity to work for the city for the last five years.