

Animal shelters plan merger

Animal Shelter

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The Watsonville animal shelter may soon be under new management.

City officials are negotiating

WATSONVILLE

a merger with the Santa Cruz

County Animal Services Authority in an effort to save money while maintaining services.

Watsonville is the only jurisdiction in Santa Cruz County to operate its own shelter, and the district has resisted giving up that independence in the past.

But in light of increasing expenses and a shortfall in the city's budget, officials have been looking for ways to maintain services while cutting costs.

Police Chief Terry Medina said it costs the city more than

'We realized we needed them, and they needed us.'

POLICE CHIEF TERRY MEDINA

\$300,000 a year to operate the shelter.

City officials considered shifting responsibility for the shelter from the police department to public works, but ultimately decided joining the joint-powers agency made more sense. Officials said they were impressed with the quality of the county system, and that a merger was the most economical option.

"We realized we needed them, and they needed us," Medina said.

The county system, operated under a joint-powers agreement, includes Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley and the county.

Mike McFarland, head of Animal Services, said a deal would benefit his agency as well by providing shelter space in South County. The agency operates from a facility in Scotts Valley.

It is unclear what a merger would cost the city, as negotiations are ongoing.

McFarland said he hopes to conclude the final details regarding finances and employees in a week or two.

In 2003, Animal Services housed 3,581 animals. The city shelter takes in about 3,000 stray animals a year.

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