

Local

✓ Animal Shelter RP Watsonville council decides city should keep animal shelter

JUL 15 1992

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

The Watsonville City Council last night decided that the city should have its own animal shelter.

The council decided unanimously to keep a shelter in the city and to take proposals from various agencies on staffing and providing animal control.

Money for upgrading the shelter could come from a \$300,000 bequest left to the city by the late Gabrielle Olive Vierra for the purchase of land, construction or expansion of an animal shelter.

Although a probate judge decided that the money could be used for animal control as well, Councilman Todd McFarren said he thought using it for a shelter was more in accordance with Vierra's wishes.

In taking the action, the council circumvented a debate that had been brewing in the community and in the committee the council set up last year to look into the matter.

The committee, which has been meeting monthly since October, became quickly polarized between pro-SPCA and anti-SPCA forces, and was unable to agree on how the city should proceed. Committee members last night presented the council with two options:

- Expand the city's pound and contract with a third party to operate it, or

- Contract with the SPCA for the animal control and shelter services.

Bill Meade, a consultant hired by the committee to do a feasibility study on the expansion of the city's current pound, had also submitted a bid to provide animal-welfare services.

Committee member Ed Moore spoke in support of contracting with the SPCA. Saying that most animal-control problems are really "people problems that can only be addressed through education," Moore outlined the SPCA's many educational programs, which are staffed by more than 200 volunteers.

Local veterinarian Dave Carroll, who also sat on the committee, spoke in favor of running the shelter locally.

Under the proposal put forward by Meade's company, Animal Care Equipment & Services, five officers would be stationed in the city. Response time would be six minutes as opposed to the 30 minutes he said the SPCA has.

Carroll said it made more sense to spend the bequest on capital improvements; if spent on ser-

vices, it would be gone within two years, he said. If the city retains its shelter, and bids for services, it would be in a better position to keep costs down.

A local shelter would encourage people to pick up their lost pets, he said. Carroll said the adoption rate at the old shelter was miserable, but he attributed it to poor management.

"Our main concern is that a local shelter be built," he said. "If it's put out to bid, I feel all the members of the committee will be satisfied."

Several Watsonville residents spoke last night in support of a local shelter.

Resident Tony Franich, who said he has three dogs and five cats, told the council that Santa Cruz was too far for many older people to go to retrieve lost pets. Many don't drive, or can't drive, he said. He added that many poor people can't get time off work and don't have cars and so wouldn't be able to get their pets.

Jodi Paterniti, executive director of the SPCA, spoke in support of the SPCA's programs. Paterniti said that although the SPCA initially declined to bid on operating the Watsonville shelter, it has found someone who could manage it and will submit a bid.

Over the past year, the debate has been heated and has included letters to the editor accusing committee members of conflict of interest.

The council's action was proposed by City Manager Steve Salomon.

Salomon told the council that putting out a request for proposals will help the council "compare apples with apples."

"I'm not sure you can do that with what has been presented to you," he said.

Salomon is suggesting that staff review the bids. He said if the council wants the committee to review the bids, it should be restructured so that no committee member is directly involved with any potential bidders.

The city has been contracting with the SPCA since last fall. The Police Department provides animal control, and the SPCA picks up the animals from the Watsonville pound each day and brings them to its shelter on Seventh Avenue in Santa Cruz. Watsonville residents who want to claim their pets or adopt a pet now must travel to Santa Cruz to do so.