

City Council defeats anti-fluoride measure

By LIZ KELLAR

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Barbs and accusations flew Tuesday night at the Watsonville City Council meeting, where an anti-fluoride group pushed an ordinance that would ban adding fluoride to the city's water.

WATSONVILLE

But while fluoride opponents sporting "Clean Water" badges outnumbered fluoride supporters 3-to-1, the council voted 5-2 against the ordinance. Council members Judy Doering-Nielsen and Betty Bobeda were in the minority.

The ordinance, introduced by Doering-Nielsen after the council approved searching for funding to fluoridate the city's water, would have prohibited adding any substance to the city's water that has not been approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration.

The language of the ordinance did not specifically address fluoride, and the mineral is not in the FDA's jurisdiction.

Fluoride opponent Kathy Norton said the group will file a petition to place a similar initiative on the ballot for a special election.

The group will need to collect signatures from 15 percent of the city's 12,645 registered voters, or 1,897 signatures.

The requirement drops to 10 percent to place an initiative on the regular ballot.

City attorney Alan Smith said state law, which mandates the fluoridation of water systems with more than 10,000 customers, takes precedence over local ordinances, and it may be "improper" to place such an initiative on a ballot. He stressed that this issue has not been tested in court, and he has not yet written an opinion on the matter.

In other news, the council agreed to revamp its application process for taxi-cab permits. The issuing of new permits for the city's three cab companies has been controversial in past years. The most-established company, Courtesy Cabs, has eight permits compared to Green Cab's four permits and Yellow Cab's five.

The new process will involve a lottery drawing and a quota system. The city determined a response time of less than 15 minutes was appropriate and used the existing 19 permits applied to the current city population to reach a quota of one cab per 2,700 residents.

The city's estimated population growth will be reviewed yearly, and new permits will be granted based on that growth.

Contact Liz Kellar at
lkellar@santa-cruz.com.