

Crime + Criminals
Graffiti

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Council considers revised ordinance on graffiti cleanup

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Watsonville City Council tomorrow night will review several ordinances that would give the city authority to clean up graffiti and restrict the sale of materials used in writing graffiti.

The ordinance, drafted by a group of city officials called the Graffiti Abatement Committee, would give property owners seven days to clean up the scribbles. Owners could clean it themselves within that time or allow the city to do it at no cost to them.

If property owners do not remove the graffiti within the seven-day period or allow the city to remove it, the graffiti would be considered a public nuisance, and the city would clean it up and bill the owner.

City workers would be engaged in the cleanup or the city could hire a private firm.

The current ordinance is a revised version of an earlier one that placed responsibility for removing graffiti on the property owners. Under that ordinance, owners were given seven days to clean up the mess or face a fine. This ordinance was met with opposition from property owners, who said it punished them for being victims.

The council will also consider a second graffiti ordinance that would place restrictions on the sale of materials such as spray paint and large tip markers. Merchants would have to keep these materials locked up or in an area not easily accessible to customers.

Restitution to victims is also included in the ordinances. Anyone

convicted of defacing property will be required to compensate property owners.

In addition, the ordinances address prevention and education. Art programs for youths, such as mural painting, will be featured, as well as city-sponsored cleanup efforts involving youths. Increased police presence on city streets and a push to bring vandals to court more quickly are also part of the city's war on graffiti.

In other City Council business on tomorrow's agenda:

- A proposal to reduce flood control and water conservation fees paid to the county by churches and schools will be considered. If approved, the fee would drop from \$120 per acre to \$90 per acre.

- The Council will consider extending a special use permit for construction of Pajaro Valley Inn, a 100-room motel on 821 Airport Blvd. The motel would include a 3,600-square-foot conference room.

Since the motel would be in an area designated as a coastal zone, a coastal development permit is needed along with the special use permit.

The special use permit can be extended in one-year intervals and can be renewed indefinitely. The use permit was first approved in 1991 and has been extended annually since then.

The City Council will meet tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. at City Hall, 250 Main St. The afternoon session starts 4:30 p.m. and breaks for dinner at 6 p.m. before resuming at 7:30 p.m.