

City district map redrawn

It goes to council next week

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

A new election-district map was approved last night by a committee set up to oversee the redistricting process for the city of Watsonville.

The new district boundaries leave District 6 without a representative, putting Councilwoman Betty Murphy, who now represents District 6, in District 7 with Councilwoman Betty Bobeda. Both district seats were up for re-election in November anyway, along with District 1, served by Paul Milladin, and District 2, served by Oscar Rios.

There are four districts with a Latino majority, two of them with a Latino population of more than 80 percent.

The map was recommended to the advisory committee by attorney Joaquin Avila, who was hired as a consultant by the city. Avila drew up the new map based on 1990 census figures and an analysis of current registered voters.

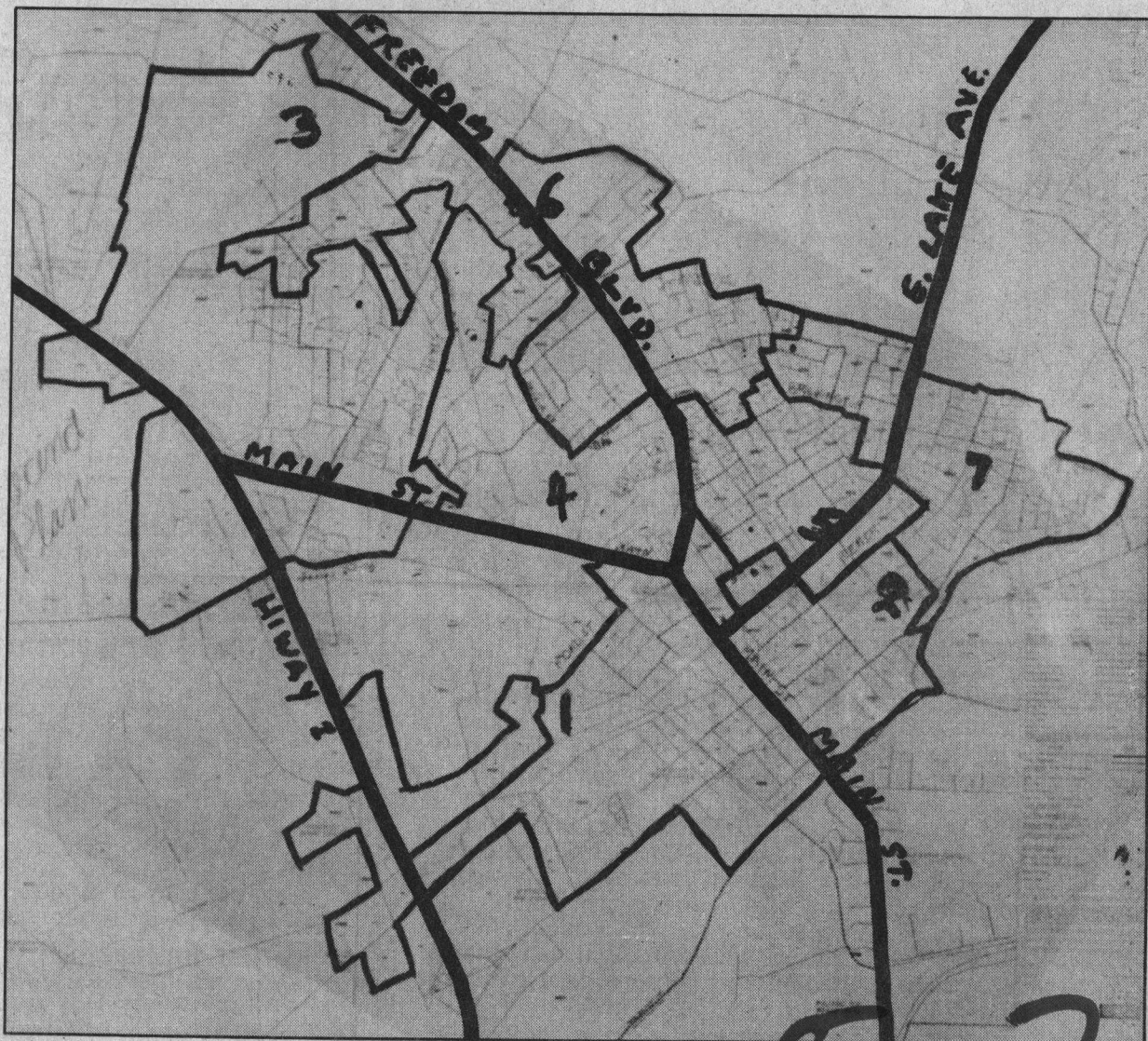
After about an hour and a half of discussion, the committee gave the map its approval. It will recommend that the City Council adopt the map at the council's May 14 meeting.

Watsonville changed from an at-large election system to a district system in 1989, as the result of a voting-rights lawsuit brought by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. Avila was the lead attorney for MALDEF in the suit. The city has to update its map every 10 years when new census information becomes available. Under the terms of the lawsuit, at least two districts must have a Latino majority.

The most drastic change is to District 1, where a significant amount of growth occurred between 1980 when the last census was taken, and 1990. Districts 3 and 4 now move down to incorporate part of the old District 1, and District 1 moves a bit into District 2. All of the districts have been shifted counterclockwise on the city map.

Before working on the map, Avila put the 1990 census figures into the existing districts to determine the current Latino population in each. Because there is no way to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens using the census data, Avila also looked at the number of registered voters with Spanish surnames in each district. He said what he found was "alarming."

According to 1990 census information, the Latino population in



New district lines are shown on map. Heavy lines are main thoroughfares in the city.

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Low-key reaction from council

The district map for Watsonville approved by a city advisory committee last night, if approved by the City Council, will place Councilwomen Betty Murphy and Betty Bobeda in District 7 and radically change Councilman Paul Milladin's district, District 1.

All three would have had to run in November to retain their seats anyway. Murphy, who now represents District 6, and Milladin, along with District 2 Councilman Oscar Rios, were elected to two-year terms in 1989, and elections in their districts will be held in November.

Bobeda was appointed to the council last week, following the death of Johnny Kacsmark. Although Kacsmark had been elect-

ed to a four-year term, the city charter requires that an appointee serve only until the next municipal election.

What neither Murphy nor Bobeda had counted on, however, was that they might have to run against each other.

"Well, my goodness," said Bobeda this morning, when she learned what the proposed map would do. Bobeda said she had been planning on running in November, but didn't know if she would run against Murphy.

"I really can't give you an honest answer. I haven't even gone to my first (council) meeting yet," she said.

Murphy could not be reached

for comment this morning.

Milladin, who in 1989 won by just 37 votes in his race against community activist Cruz Gomez, said he wasn't daunted by the fact that the new map increases the Latino population in his district, currently at 75 percent to 86 percent. He said that wouldn't affect his decision to run.

"I do very well with Hispanics," he said. "They're my kind of people."

Milladin said he hadn't made a firm decision about running.

"So far I am," he said, "but I've kind of got mixed emotions. You get to the point where you want some leisure time."

-Chela Zabin

MAP

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the old District 1 was 75 percent. But Latinos made up only 35.6 percent of the registered voters there. In the old District 2, Latinos were 89 percent of the population, and 61 percent of the registered voters.

Usually a population of between 65 percent and 75 percent is enough to insure a majority of voters in a district, Avila said. But because of the high number of undocumented residents, he figured the population percentage would have to be more than 80 percent to insure two districts with a majority of Latino voters.

The changes to District 1 do that, increasing the Latino population from 75 percent to 86 percent. The Latino populations in Districts 2, 4 and 5, where Latinos are in the majority, don't change significantly from the old to the new map.

Avila said there were two underlying legal principles he used in making the map. First, the districts have to be roughly equal in population so each person's vote

carries about the same weight. Second, the map has to be drawn in such a way that the Latino community isn't artificially fractured or consolidated so as to reduce its power. Between those constraints and the creation of two districts with an 80 percent or more Latino population, there wasn't a whole lot of room to maneuver, he said.

Avila created a map that did that, then changed it slightly to make it conform more closely to already establish precinct maps. That was the plan he presented to the committee.

"It's a plan I could defend in court," Avila said.

Many committee members said they would have liked to have their own copies of the map so they could take a closer look at where the new boundaries fall. Because Avila only had one map, the committee took a 20-minute break to study the map. Then they voted 12-1 to recommend its adoption. Most seemed happy with the map, but a few grumbled that there wasn't really any point in having the committee, since the districts were pretty much mandated by the law.

Ann Soldo, a former council-

woman and mayor, who wanted more time to mull over the boundaries, was the only dissenting vote. Earlier, Soldo had asked if there was any way to create more Latino-majority districts. She was told that it was impossible because of the way, outside of a downtown core, Latinos are spread out throughout the rest of the city.

"It's not that I'm saying the plan isn't good," she said. Noting that the committee had taken only an hour and a half to decide, she said "that's quite rapid. I don't think we should be a one-hour committee."

Committee member Tony Campos was absent.

There may be a few more wrinkles in the districting process, however. Avila said he expects the Census Bureau to adjust some of their figures by July 15 as a result of lawsuits alleging an undercount of minorities. He didn't think, however, that the adjustment would be really big for Watsonville, and said minor changes could most likely be made to the map in time for the November election. In 1992, the Census Bureau will release some estimates related to citizenship and that could again create a need for some fine tuning of the map.

Under the recommended plan, District 1 would have a population

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of 4,446, of which 3,802, or 86 percent, would be Latino; District 2 would have 4,523, and 3,931, or 87 percent would be Latino; District 3 would have 4,452, and 1,831, or 41 percent would be Latino; District 4 would have 4,490, and 2,909, or 65 percent would be Latino; District 5 would have 4,409, with 2,773 or 63 percent of those being Latino; District 6 would have 4,280, and 2,113 or 49 percent would be Latino; and District 7 would have 4,499, with 1,568 or 35 percent Latino.