

Watsonville considers cigarette-machine ban

The days of cigarette machines in bars and bowling alleys are fading fast, and Watsonville will not be behind the times, the City Council indicated Tuesday night.

At the request of the Police Department, the council adopted a ban on tobacco vending machines within city limits. The ordinance must come back before the council for a second reading before it takes effect.

Health advocates nationwide are campaigning to get the vending machines banned because they are too easy for teenagers and children to get to. They argue that selling a cancer-causing substance as if it were candy or soda sends the wrong message.

A Pajaro Valley school district study of 15-year-olds in December found that when the teenagers tried to buy cigarettes from restaurants, gas stations and stores, they succeeded 62 percent of the time. But when they tried to buy from vending machines, no one ever stopped them.

Lt. Mickey Aluffi told the council in a memo that "Tobacco is addictive, lethal, and the most heavily advertised and least regulated drug in our community.

"The young people of Watsonville receive education in school from the Prevention and Student Assistance Office relative to the dangers of tobacco. Outside of school, these students are exposed to pro-use messages, such as advertising and parental use."

Police are also working with the school district on a program to educate business owners and employees about teenagers and cigarettes. Selling tobacco products to

minors violates state law, with fines of \$200 for the first offense, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for the third, Aluffi said.

Aluffi said that the vending machine ban shouldn't inconvenience adults, who can still buy tobacco products in many stores.

In other action Tuesday night, the council:

- Contracted with a landscape architecture firm, Callandar Associates, to draw up at \$50,250 Parks and Open Space master plan for the city. The firm will inventory existing parks; hold neighborhood meetings to find out what people want and need; and define goals, priorities and costs for the city's parks. The money will come out of the city's parks fund; and

- Approved a preliminary plan for Peace Drive Park, including a basketball court, playground equipment and creek viewpoint. The neighborhood park is near Oakridge, Faith and Hope streets. The park development will cost \$176,000 and will be paid for out of the parks fund and the 1982 Park Bond Act.

—Susanna Heckman