

Council warned of city problem with street gangs

By DAN FITCH
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville High School Principal Tony Calvo told the City Council last night that youth gang violence exists in the city and that the "pooling" of community resources may be the best way to control it.

Calvo was reporting on the findings of a study of the problem made by a committee of which he is a member.

"At this point it (gang activity) is not a law-enforcement problem, but a community problem," Calvo said.

Calvo estimated there are four or five youth gangs in the city. He said the key to controlling the problem is to get the young people involved in the community.

"We need to deal with the problem early because it has the potential for serious consequences to the community down the road," Calvo said. "The kids show good leadership qualities that need to be channeled."

Calvo suggested that the school district, the Recreation Department and the Youth Services board continue to promote events and programs that engage the energies of young people.

Recreation Services Manager Jack Smith told the council of events that have already been successful in getting teenagers involved, and off the streets,

and of future events that could take place.

Smith said the city received a \$5,000 grant from the county to sponsor "drug-free events for teens" and that after a slow start the first event — a "Winter Excitement" dance — drew a crowd of 400 kids. Several youth groups worked together to organize the dance.

Smith said a second event is being worked on and that more youth groups have expressed a desire to sponsor events.

"We hope to offer six more events that will spin off six other events," he said. "The great thing about the grant is that the energy the kids pumped out could spill over to other groups."

Smith and Calvo said they hope the energy will hit adult groups who could help out with youth-related activities.

Calvo also said teenagers in the city need more role models and that a full-time counselor could be a big help.

"We need to incorporate counselors into the school structure," he said. "We need role models for the kids and we need more facilities because the existing ones are not always available for activities."

Councilman Tony Campos suggested that the city staff investigate the possibility of adding "more recreation to our city programs."