

Airport crowding may end Fly-In

By STEVE SHENDER

Watsonville Chamber of Commerce officials, wondering whether slackening attendance means that the scope of the annual Antique Airplane Fly-In may have to be reduced, may have no choice in the matter.

The choice already appears to have been made for them by the city, which plans to pave a large grassy area at the confluence of the airport's two runways to add 72 permanent "tie-down" spaces there. There are currently 231 planes at the airport. City Manager John Radin said Tuesday that the work is to be completed by late fall.

Airport Manager Vern Ackerman told the City Council during a study session on the airport master plan Tuesday evening that if the new tie-down area fills up, as he anticipates it will, there will be little physical room for the Fly-In at the airport by next spring.

Ackerman said that the airport is in serious need of more hangar and tie-down space. He said he had only three vacant permanent tie-down spots remaining, and that he expected those to be filled "by the end of the week."

The airport manager and Radin said that if the city of Santa Cruz follows through on its pledge to close its Sky Park airport at Scotts Valley, most of the owners

of the 90 planes now there will likely move their aircraft to Watsonville. If that happens, they said, the new tie-down area will fill up rapidly.

"If Sky Park closes," said Radin, "you might as well say that room for future Fly-Ins will be extremely limited."

"I kind of hate to see the Fly-In go," said Councilwoman Betty Murphy Tuesday night. She urged city officials to hold off on filling up the new tie-down area. "If this doesn't have to be used up next year, there's still a chance for another Fly-In," she said.

"I'm not against the Fly-In," said Ackerman, "I'm just looking at reality; when the garage is full, that's it."

Ackerman said after the session that space for the Fly-In has been shrinking steadily over the years, as the city has set aside more and more area for permanent aircraft parking. This year, he said, the Fly-In was confined to the area immediately in front of the terminal building and the large grassy plot which the city plans to pave.

Radin said Tuesday the paving work will cost the city \$210,000. He said the cost would be recouped over an eight-year period through rentals from the new tie-downs, which, he said, would total \$2,000 a month at current rates.