

Watsonville, county animal shelters to merge

Officials say move makes sense but offers little in cost savings

Animal Shelters
SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

A merger between the city animal shelter and the Santa Cruz County Animal Services authority is expected to be complete by mid-November.

WATSONVILLE The City Council is scheduled to vote Sept. 14 on a merger agreement, approved by the county board Wednesday.

The county, Scotts Valley, Capitola and San-

ta Cruz operate the authority under a joint powers agreement, but the city has maintained an independent agency.

However, with finances tight, city officials decided to explore whether a merger could result in savings without compromising animal care.

Watsonville Police Capt. Kim Austin, who oversees the city shelter, said financially the merger will probably be a wash, but the deal represents a "positive change" for both agencies.

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A small agency has drawbacks, she said. For example, with her small staff, she can't easily fill the hole when someone calls in sick.

The countywide agency, which is based in Scotts Valley, will gain a Pajaro Valley site, making it easier for South County residents outside city limits to access services.

In 2003, Animal Services housed 3,581 animals, while the city shelter takes in about 3,000 strays a year.