

# Watsonville gang activity is a worry

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WATSONVILLE — A recent spate of violent gang activity has prompted swift action by the Police Department and a call by a city councilman for more city funding to combat the problem.

Monday afternoon, police investigated the second drive-by shooting in a week. Police said a youth with ties to the Northside youth gang was shot at while walking at the busy intersection at Freedom Boulevard and Lincoln Street, about 2:50 p.m.

No arrests were made, but Det. Eddie Rodriguez said police were looking for the suspect's vehicle.

Police Chief Terry Medina said he has reassigned three officers to a special unit whose goal is patrolling trouble spots and keeping tighter surveillance on suspected gang members.

Medina said gang activity *per se* isn't on the rise. But the recent drive-by shootings, in which no one has been injured, are "the kind of activity that creates attention.

"It's pretty serious activity and we've had a few of those recently," he said.

Police have issued a \$50,000 warrant for the arrest of Amado Hernandez, 20, charging him with assault with a deadly weapon for a drive-by shooting April 5, which was directed at three youths in a car on Second Street.

Police said Hernandez is a member of the Northside youth gang, while the people in the other car have ties with the Poorsiders, another youth gang.

Youths affiliated with the same two groups went at it last November, leaving 23-year-old Luis "Woody" Sandoval dead from a shotgun blast outside the city library.

Police said Hernandez is on probation for a brandishing which occurred two months ago at Marinovich Park on Second Street, petty theft and assault with a deadly weapon.

"He's looking at prison time for this," said Rodriguez.

Besides the drive-by shootings, police have received numerous reports of handgun brandishings and assaults. One assault by known gang members last week on a 12-year-old boy who was going to a neighborhood store to buy food for his mother has particularly enraged the westside neighborhood, said Rodriguez.

"The neighbors are getting fed up," he said.

Although the special gang detail will remain active for a few weeks, it's not seen as a long-term solution to the problem.

A group of educators, police and city officials calling themselves Network for a Safe and Healthy Community have been meeting monthly to think up ways to attack the gang problem.

So far, the group's efforts have received mixed results.

Councilman Dennis Osmer said "nothing's been happening. We've been meeting, but progress has been slow."

Osmer will ask the City Council tonight to consider funding a counselor to coordinate youth programs.