

# Study says city has enough cops

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A state commission has determined there are already enough police officers on the streets of Watsonville to adequately respond to calls for service, but City Council members say they have no intention of changing their decision to hire six more cops this year.

"I think for a community this size and the crime rate we have," Mayor Ann Soldo said yesterday, "we're justified in having more police officers."

Several other council members and police administrators agreed, even though the three-month study of the Watsonville Police Department by the state Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training showed otherwise.

The study, which was released yesterday, praised the department for its enthusiasm and a variety of its programs and management techniques. Commission consultants reviewed the department at the end of last year shortly after the start of the strike at two frozen-food plants, which at times pushed the department to its limits, and produced \$173,000 in overtime costs last year.

The commission made several recommendations, such as abandoning the traffic division in favor of more patrol officers, which Police Chief Ray Belgard has already begun to implement.

But in analyzing the response time by patrol officers to calls for service, the commission concluded that the results "assure that the size of Watsonville's patrol force continues to be adequate to meet future demands."

Watsonville police officers usually respond to emergency calls for service within a minute and arrive at the scene within three to five minutes, according to the report.

Response time is "a pretty good basis for analyzing your staffing requirements," City Manager John Radin said. "When you start backing up calls for long periods of time, then you're understaffed. You don't have enough people to answer calls."

Mike Di Miceli, chief of the commission's Management Counseling Services Bureau, which conducted the study,

said there is no overall standard by which to judge response times. But, he said, Watsonville's response time is "pretty good."

It was because of that, and the department's high marks in other areas, that the commission "did not include ... any suggestion to augment or increase the number of officers to be assigned to patrol," Di Miceli said.

That runs contrary to the claim by council members that the city needs more police officers. The council dipped into the city's reserve funds two months ago to pay for six more police officers this year.

In June, City Manager Radin opposed the idea of hiring more officers because he said the city couldn't afford it. But he said yesterday he won't use the report to get council members to change their minds.

Council members "made their decision and that's that," Radin said.

But, he added, the study "shows that basically we have a pretty adequate force right now" without the additional officers.

That depends, however, on who examines the numbers.

"What one person feels is adequate is not what another person thinks is adequate," Councilwoman Betty Murphy said yesterday.

"Statistically speaking, we have enough policeman," she said. But more officers would mean people will feel safer in Watsonville, Murphy said.

Besides, the city is growing and it takes as long as a year to hire a new police officer, she said. "By the time we get all those slots filled, we're going to need them."

Police Chief Belgard, who could not be reached this morning, has said the city needs more officers to prevent crimes rather than simply responding to them.

Even Councilman Rex Clark, who opposed using reserve funds to hire new officers, said today he won't call for a review of the council's decision because of the report.

"The public perception is that we need more police officers," he said, "and that's what we're there for, to respond to the public, within reason."