

Next year's election faces redistricting dilemma

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The block-by-block census information needed by the city of Watsonville to redraw its election districts won't be available until 1992 — after next year's municipal elections.

That means it's possible that a council member could be elected next November, only to find him- or herself living outside the district after boundaries are redrawn a year later.

City Attorney Luis Hernandez said last night that in such a case,

the council member would continue to represent the district until the next municipal election, at which time a new member would be elected to finish the term.

Another option would be for the council to call a special election, but such a move would be costly, Hernandez said.

Next year's election will be the second held under the district system, which was implemented after the city lost a lawsuit brought by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund that claimed that the old, at-large sys-

tem discriminated against Latinos by diluting their voting power.

The current council, elected last year, was the first voted in under the new system. Three seats — now held by Oscar Rios, Paul Mil-ladin and Betty Murphy — will be up for election next year.

When the districts were drawn up, the intention was to create two districts that would have a Latino population of at least 75 percent in order to ensure Latino representation on the council. The districts were drawn up using data from the 1980 census.

The census does not make a distinction between citizens and non-citizens, however, and MAL-DEF attorney Joaquin Avila estimated last year that 40 percent to 60 percent of adult Latinos in Watsonville aren't eligible to vote.

When voter-registration and campaign workers went into the two districts, they discovered that demographics had changed. Many of the Latino citizens who had lived in the areas had moved out and greater numbers of non-citizens had moved in. New housing projects like Meadow View

Apartments and Apple Hill condominiums had gone in District 1 since the 1980 census, bringing in large numbers of Anglo residents.

Whatever the reason, Latino voters were in the majority in only one of those two districts last year. According to a survey carried out by the Register-Pajaronian after the election last year, people with Spanish surnames made up only 34 percent of registered voters in District 1. They were in the majority — 60 percent had Spanish surnames — in District 2.

Politics-watchers on all sides

have been eagerly awaiting the new census information. Because the population has changed significantly, at least in District 1, some want the boundaries redrawn to again ensure a Latino majority in that district. Others claim that Latinos have now dispersed evenly throughout the city and say that census data will show that it is impossible to set up two districts with a Latino majority.

At any rate, the new districts, which will be redrawn by the council or appointed consultants or committee, won't change things for the upcoming election.