

City funds graffiti abatement

By JUDY BRILL
STAFF WRITER

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A \$35,000, 10-week summer graffiti abatement program last night won the approval of the Watsonville City Council.

Together with Career Works, which oversees the Job Training Partnership Act, the program will employ "at-risk" youth to paint over graffiti on public and private property within the city from June 16 to August 11.

As part of the partnership, Career Works has agreed to work

with the city Gang Intervention Program, BASTA, the Watsonville Police Department and other community-based organizations to hire youth as workers for the paint-out. The city will provide technical assistance, paint and a project liaison.

The money, which will also be used for other graffiti-prevention measures, will come from the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund.

The program won unanimous approval, although councilman

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Tony Campos said he thought the money was being wasted. "I'd rather see the money go to hire another cop," he said, calling the paint-out effort "a waste." He called instead for an "ordinance with teeth," something that would make parents liable for the damage caused by their children's graffiti.

Mayor Oscar Rios countered, "Something is wrong with the way the state is functioning. The jails are packed ... why are all these teenagers degenerating?"

Rios suggested the underlying problems of destructive behavior needed to be addressed. He and other council members praised the summer program as a source of positive alternatives for the city's youth.

Police Chief Medina told the council an ordinance is almost completed that will provide more "teeth" in fighting graffiti, including requiring spray paints and markers be locked up or made otherwise inaccessible in stores.