

Council votes to provide senior center food

"It's wonderful that the city is going to put \$100,000 a year into providing meals for seniors."

—Sam Karp, Food and Nutrition Services

By STEVE SHENDER

On a 5-0 vote (Councilmen Frank Osmer and Joe Marsano absent) the Watsonville City Council Thursday afternoon endorsed a proposal by City Manager John Radin to put the city into the catering business.

Council members authorized Radin to make arrangements with the Pajaro Valley Unified School District for the school district to provide 125 hot meals a day at the new Watsonville Senior Center, starting Nov. 1. The city would pay for the meals out of its own funds — Radin said Thursday the money would come from sales tax revenues — at a cost of about \$7,000 to \$9,000 a month.

Radin told the council that it would cost the city about \$22,000

to \$23,000 to finance the meals program through the end of January. Meanwhile, he said, city officials would search for alternative funding sources.

The city's involvement in the program, Radin said, would only be "until such time as we can see if we can negotiate and pick up some money from the state." He also said, however, that negotiations with the state could be quite lengthy.

Though the city's involvement in the meals program was clinched Thursday, school district participation has yet to be approved by the school board.

Radin said Thursday afternoon that the "school district has offered to do this (provide meals) on a trial basis for one year." School Superintendent Jim Baker said earlier in the day, however, that he would not support the schools becoming involved for more than a year.

Comments by others Thursday

afternoon and this morning indicated that the city's participation in the program could become as open-ended as the school district's is likely to be limited.

The city's involvement in the Senior Center meals program was occasioned by the collapse Wednesday of negotiations between the Association of Watsonville Area Seniors (AWAS) and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).

AWAS, which will run the Senior Center, is leasing the facility in the old Mormon Church on East Fifth Street from the city for \$1 a year. FNS has been providing meals at the International Senior Center at 127 E. Beach St. The two organizations were unable to reach agreement on the terms of a lease under which FNS would move its meals program to the new Senior Center.

Negotiations between the two groups broke down when they were unable to agree on who

would retain ultimate control over the center's kitchen and dining area during meal times — AWAS or FNS. FNS had been demanding "programmatic control" of the kitchen and dining areas from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., during which time, according to FNS Director Sam Karp, the group intended to run a number of social services programs as well as serve meals.

After Radin advised AWAS board members Wednesday that the city would be willing to assume at least initial responsibility for financing the meals program, Karp arranged for FNS to pick up the lease at the International Senior Center, where, he said, his group would continue to serve meals and provide other services.

The city manager Thursday held out the hope that Watsonville would eventually secure the same type of state financing which enables FNS to run meals programs in seven locations in Santa Cruz

and San Benito counties. And Mayor Bill Johnston suggested that the city might eventually receive the funds now earmarked by the state for Food and Nutrition Services' operation here.

But Dennis Albaugh, planner-program developer for the Area Agency on Aging of Santa Cruz and San Benito counties (through which all state funds for seniors meal programs for this area are funneled), indicated there was little chance that his agency would approve such a fund transfer.

"We support the program that's going to do the best job," said Albaugh, who indicated that as far as he was concerned, Karp's organization had come through that test with flying colors.

FNS' performance had been so exemplary, noted Albaugh, that the group had just received an additional \$195,000 from the state's Nutrition Reserve Fund to expand its meals program.

"So far," said Albaugh, "FNS is the only agency in the state that's serving more meals this year than last year." In a time of tight federal and state budgets and limited funds, Albaugh indicated, it was unlikely that his agency would choose to funnel seniors meals money to the city and AWAS instead of FNS, if, indeed, a choice had to be made.

"You must have a track record," he explained.

Even if extra funds were available, Albaugh said, the city's and AWAS' chances of securing any money through his group would depend on their offering the same array of programs at the Senior Center as FNS had proposed to provide there.

State and federal funds administered by the Area Agency on Aging, said Albaugh, come with a number of "mandates" — strings — requiring recipients to offer such services as health clinics,

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special nutrition education and "related seniors programming."

Asked what the city would do if the Santa Cruz-San Benito County Area Agency on Aging declined to OK funding for the city-AWAS meals program and the school district pulled out of it, Radin and Johnston suggested Thursday that Watsonville might obtain funding and meals through Monterey County. "There's a possibility of extending the Monterey County boundary line to include the Pajaro Valley and let them handle it," Johnston said.

"We serve a lot of Monterey County people, from Pajaro, in town," Radin explained.

But Monterey County Supervisors Chairman Marc Del Piero indicated today that it would be "difficult" for Monterey County to pick up the Senior Center meals program as long as Food and Nutrition Services continues to run its program on Beach Street.

"If the agency that's responsible for the area is operating a program that meets all the (legal) standards," he said, "redrawing boundary lines becomes difficult."

Added Del Piero, "The Area Agency on Aging of Monterey County is not about to become a third party to a political battle that might be going on ... in Santa Cruz County. We're only interested in doing one thing: providing meals and services to senior citizens."

Asked Thursday how long the city could support the Senior Center meals program out of its own pocket, Radin said, "I wouldn't have made the recom-

mendation if I didn't think we could do it from now until the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 1983)."

Asked whether the city would make a permanent commitment to keep the program afloat, Johnston said, "We'll just have to look into the budget situation like we do everything else."

Councilwoman Betty Murphy indicated that she believed the city had made a long term commitment to financing the Senior Center meals program, if necessary.

"That was kind of taken on this afternoon," she said. "I feel the city's made a commitment and I would hope funding for the nutritional program would be made available."