

City looks for options on animal control

By NANCY BARR
STAFF WRITER

The city of Watsonville is considering signing a contract with the SPCA for animal control, just like other cities in the county.

At the City Council's first study session on next year's budget, Mayor Betty Murphy said she would like a complete analysis of how much it would cost to let the SPCA handle animal control and how much it would cost to hire one more animal control officer if the city continued to provide the service.

City Manager John Radin said one disadvantage of contracting with the SPCA is that if dogs are impounded, the owners would have to go all the way to Seventh Avenue in Live Oak to get them.

Police Chief Ray Belgard said that could turn into an advantage for the city.

"That would make (people) a lot more cautious about taking care of their animals," Belgard said.

Murphy suggested that it may be time for the city to raise its fees to pet owners who retrieve animals from the pound, to support the animal control program. The city now spends just

over \$46,000 a year on animal control.

Last night's meeting began with an overview of the proposed 1987-88 budget of \$49.8 million. City Manager John Radin pointed out that he is suggesting few new positions other than those needed to operate the expanded wastewater-treatment plant. At that point, Councilman Vido Deretich asked Radin if he hadn't forgotten something.

"Don't you think it would be wise to start thinking about an assistant city manager if you're going to retire in a couple of years?" Deretich asked. "Everybody's got a backup but you."

"I know. It's really beginning to tell on me, too," Radin said. Radin said he will bring the council a proposal to hire an assistant before budget hearings are over.

The council also reviewed the budgets of the Recreation, Police and Fire departments.

The recreation budget of almost \$515,000 drew little comment from the council, aside from praise from the mayor for the many recreation programs run by the city.

The Police Department budget — almost \$2.5 million — does not allow for any increases

in personnel. Police Chief Ray Belgard said his staff still isn't up to the full strength authorized by the City Council last year, because it takes a long time to hire and train new officers.

He explained that's also the reason the city's revenue from traffic citations has dropped. "We have not had an effective traffic bureau this year," Belgard said, adding that one of his most productive traffic officers left the city for a job with the Highway Patrol.

When the department is at full strength, Belgard said, he will put more effort into traffic enforcement. He also plans to put officers on foot patrol.

Also mentioned during the discussion about the Police Department and communications, which falls under Belgard's jurisdiction, is that the communications center will soon be moved from the first floor of the police station to the second floor. City Manager Radin said that as part of that move, he has budgeted \$5,000 to install an electrical dumbwaiter to ferry papers back and forth from the upstairs communications center to the sergeant and records clerks downstairs.

"Why don't you cut a hole in the wall with a bucket and a

rope and let them pull it up?" joked Councilman Deretich, saying that would be a way to save some money.

The Fire Department budget of more than \$1.5 million showed little change from last year, Chief Gary Smith said.

Smith said he expects to get \$58,000 from the state for a van equipped for responses to hazardous-materials spills. The city would have to share the van with the rest of the county, Smith said, although other agencies may be charged for using it.

Smith's budget also includes \$2,000 to start a program for disposing of hazardous household materials, such as pesticides, paint thinner and gasoline. The money will pay for large drums to contain the hazardous materials.

Also included in the Fire Department budget is \$3,300 to buy equipment for use in heavy rescues. Smith said the department is not adequately equipped to rescue people should a building collapse, or in other such rescue situations.

The council's next budget study session will be Thursday. Community groups seeking funds from the city will be given a chance to speak to the council at its June 16 meeting.