

VEF Watsonville ANNEXATION P. 1

# Council finally OK's Franich

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## annexation LAFCO is next hurdle

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The proposed Franich annexation, one of the most contentious issues in Watsonville politics for a dozen years, was approved by a wide margin by the City Council last night.

The matter — whether 72 acres along East Lake Avenue should become part of the city — will now go before the county Local Agency Formation Commission. LAFCO has three months to set a public hearing schedule on the issue, and another three months to receive public input and make a final decision.

The council took three votes on the issue: one vote to say an environmental impact report for the proposal was adequate; one to accept an agreement with Tony Franich on the use of the land; and one to say the benefits of the annexation override the negative impacts.

Two City Council members sent a mixed message with their votes.

Councilmen Todd McFarren and Parr Eves voted "yes" on the EIR and on the agreement with Franich, but "no" on the last of the three questions. Councilman Lowell Hurst voted "no" on all three issues, and council members

Oscar Rios, Betty Bobeda and Al Alcalá voted "yes" on all three.

McFarren asked that the matter be broken into three votes. He said the agreement with Franich, in which Franich donates land for low-income housing and parks in return for the city's support of the annexation, was "not ungenerous." He also said the EIR met all the requirements of the law.

But, he said, "I don't feel comfortable making the statement of overriding concerns, because if I consult my conscience, which is what I'm required to do, I'd vote 'no,' because I don't think the benefits outweigh the negative impacts."

Eves did not explain his vote. At one point, he suggested the matter be put before the voters to decide, but he didn't pursue the suggestion before the council voted.

Hurst's main objection to the proposed annexation was the loss of farm land.

He pointed out that in addition to the three significant negative impacts listed in the EIR — loss of agricultural land, exacerbation of the ground water overdraft, and growth inducement — the report found 23 other serious impacts. He said some of the mitigation mea-

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asures proposed by the EIR, such as increasing classroom size to deal with the increasing number of children in the school district, were inadequate. FEB 24 1993

A school is proposed for the site, but Hurst said that even without the 394 to 577 homes proposed there, "If that school was built tomorrow, it would be filled the next day." Increased classroom size is not the answer, he said.

Bobeda, Campos and Rios said they supported the annexation as a way for the city to ease overcrowded housing by increasing the housing stock and to gain much-needed park land.

Bobeda said she thought that with the proper planning, the project could be made "to work in a reasonable and livable" way.

Alcalá said the people in his district who are against the annexation are "misguided."

"Somebody's given them the idea that it should all be low-income housing," Alcalá said. "That's unrealistic."

Rios' vote may have surprised some, because he, as did Hurst and McFarren, said he was opposed to the annexation when he campaigned for office in 1989. Rios said he supported the project as the only real alternative to the city's housing needs.

"If the city weren't overcrowded, the question wouldn't even be before us," he said.

He blasted opponents of the project as being "no-growth" advocates who want to protect farm land and wetlands at the expense of the people who live in sheds and garages. Opponents have no viable proposals for other places to build, Rios said.

And Franich's offer of nine acres for low-income housing is a big plus, he said.

"I haven't heard anybody from Buena Vista (the area in which some are suggesting the city should grow) come forward saying they want to donate land," he said.

Rios said he didn't think putting the matter before the people was a good idea, especially in light of how many of the city's Latinos are not eligible to vote.

Most of the annexation's opponents had given up hope that the council would vote against it and were not at the meeting last night. Kirk Schmidt, president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, was the only new speaker to oppose the project. Schmidt said the farm bureau objected to the conversion of prime agricultural land.

Several people had come to support Franich and to express their frustration at how long it has taken to decide the matter. One of them was George Silva, a member of the city's soccer league, who urged the council to act.

"Please do something, even if it's wrong," he said.

His remarks drew loud applause.

Although there has been extensive discussion about what would be built on the annexed land, any development will have to go through its own process of EIRs and public hearings by the city.