

Centralized-government proposal opposed by Watsonville mayor

A regional government proposal now before the state legislature was criticized yesterday by Watsonville Mayor Todd McFarren.

Speaking at a noon meeting of the Watsonville Rotary Club, McFarren attacked the bill, AB 3, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Willie Brown of San Francisco.

"It would set up a real hierarchy of central planning," McFarren said. "Essentially what it would do is usurp local control."

The mayor acknowledged that many of the problems facing local government are regional in nature, but that he didn't think Brown's bill was the way to attack them.

AB 3 would create a number of state commissions that would take on the duties of existing agencies such as the air pollution boards, LAFCO, and the existing regional government associations.

McFarren said his problem with the proposal was that it provided no additional money for the regional boards and that he doubts they could do the job correctly. If such a plan were to be tried, he said, it should be tested in one of the large urban areas to see if it would work before it was imposed on the entire state.

In his talk yesterday, McFarren also touched on several other issues facing the city:

- **General plan:** He said the city's future growth would have to be toward the Buena Vista area, because the rolling pasture land there is of less agricultural value than the land east of the city. Annexation of the Franich property next to the East Lake Village shopping center is a dead issue, he said, unless the Board of Supervisors undergoes an astonishing political transformation.

- **The airport:** He said no one on the City Council favors converting the airport to housing, as proposed by some local community activists. McFarren said he doubts that the city will be looking to expand the airport, either.

- **City-county relations:** They're pretty good now, he said, adding that the city has been working with Supervisor Ray Belgard to develop Pinto Lake as a regional park and get a path around its perimeter completed.

- **Freedom annexation:** "It certainly would be logical," McFarren said. The city is now considering the issue as part of its General Plan review, but the mayor said he doesn't know how Freedom residents feel about it. Increased taxes in the unincorporated area of the county might make people more positive about getting into the city, he speculated.

—Mike Wallace