

Census miscount costly

Census 2000 *4-14-01*
Left-out neighborhood could cost Watsonville \$150,000 yearly

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✓ **WATSONVILLE** — Country Waffles is a Watsonville breakfast establishment. But not according to the feds.

The city absorbed the popular restaurant, a handful of other Freedom Boulevard businesses and the roughly 2,500 people who live in the area in last year's annexation of the Freedom-Carey neighborhood.

But when U.S. Census Bureau counters tallied the city last year, it listed the new Watsonvillians as residents of unincorporated Santa Cruz County.

City officials fear that will leave Watsonville undercounted and underfunded.

The city's population should be 2,000 to 2,500 more than the 44,265 reported by the Census Bureau, city officials say. And the undercount could cost the city state and federal dollars, as much as \$150,000 annually.

Many forms of financial help are allocated on the basis of population: the more people, the more money.

Mayor Chuck Carter said the addition of the Freedom-Carey neighborhood would "nudge us closer to 50,000 people." That benchmark is especially important to Wat-

sonville because cities of that size qualify for even more public money.

Pat Treseler, owner of Country Waffles, likes being a part of Watsonville. Law-enforcement response time has improved, she said, and water billing is simpler.

But providing those services could get expensive for the city unless the Census Bureau adjusts Watsonville's population. City officials based their decision to annex the 120-acre neighborhood in part on the additional funds they thought they would get with a larger population.

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Watsonville absorbed the Freedom-Carey area last year, but the census counted the neighborhood as part of the county.

Census: Costly undercount

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"That was part of our calculation," City Manager Carlos Palacios said.

It costs the city about \$250,000 a year to provide police, fire and utility service to the area, Palacios said. Property tax dollars from the neighborhood about cover that cost. But street improvements and other repairs will cost more, making the additional money vital, he said.

Palacios said he is confident the Census Bureau will adjust the numbers. Census officials, however, would say

only that they would review the case, most likely this summer.

The bureau performed its decennial head count in April. The annexation, which was years in the making, was not official until July 1.

The Freedom-Carey neighborhood, formerly known as Whiskey Hill, includes the land along Carey Avenue southwest of Freedom Boulevard and the Freedom Shopping Center at Freedom and Airport boulevards.

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