

Council poised to endorse Watsonville growth plan

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Council aims to control urban sprawl

✓ By C.J. CANNINO

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

There is probably no greater example of how urban sprawl took over prime farm land than the city of San Jose and with that in mind city planners set about avoiding the San Jose syndrome and controlling growth with a growth-management strategy for the Pajaro Valley.

The Watsonville City Council is scheduled to vote at this evening's meeting on the urban growth plan that calls for the eventual construction of more than 4,000 housing units. Half the units will be located inside the Watsonville City limits and the other half out-

side the city limits and that will require the city to annex the land in order to build.

On April 1 the Watsonville City Planning Commission gave a unanimous thumbs up on the growth plan which sets the stage for endorsement by the City Council. If the council endorses the plan Action Pajaro Valley will then set into a motion a signature campaign to get the growth plan on the ballot this November. Once the required 1,200 signatures are collected, the initiative will appear on the ballot as The Watsonville Orderly Growth and Agricultural Protection Initiative and only voters living within

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Project to make Second Street first rate



LEFT: Utility crew leader for Watsonville Field Services Division Henry Cervantes (center) and other crew workers establish an ultraviolet safety barrier while working on a water main next to Watsonville Fire Station No. 1 on Second Street last week. The project includes new water mains, sewer pipes, sidewalks and street surface for the short dead-end street that parallels the fire station, said director of Public Works David Koch. The project will cost just under \$100,000 with property owners along the street paying about 50 percent through an assessment district. A community development block grant from a federal funding program is paying for the remainder. FAR LEFT: Henry Cervantes (left) and Felipe Lozano of BDS Construction of Fresno work on the project Monday.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian





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the Watsonville City limits will vote on it.

However city council endorsement is not a prerequisite for the growth plan to appear on the November ballot. "We've had strong participation from members of the council who support it, but it's really important to see tonight if we have a majority," said Lisa Dobbins, executive director of Action Pajaro Valley.

According to Watsonville City Manager Carlos Palacios, if the population continues to grow at the current rate, the city will need approximately 6,000 homes over the next 20 years to meet the demand. Even with the construction

of those units there's still a projected shortage of 2,000 homes.

At this evening's meeting Palacios is expected to give more details about the Watsonville Orderly Growth and Agricultural Protection Initiative.

"Folks can hear an overview of the growth management strategy process and they can also hear about more details about what's in the initiative and what the next steps are," said Dobbins.

"We feel the initiative will help preserve agricultural land," said Farm Bureau President Nita Gizdich. The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Santa Cruz County, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Cen-

tral Labor Council, the Watsonville Board of Realtors, and Community Alliance for Family Farmers all endorse the growth plan.

What seems to impress city officials the most is the unity of local organizations that support the growth plan. "It's a historical document," said Planning Commission Chairman Arcadio Viveros. "It's a testament in bringing together all these people," he added.

Outlined in the growth plan are six areas slated for development. Those areas include: Buena Vista, zoned for primarily residential use; Atkinson Lane, affordable workforce housing; East Of East Lake Ave, continued agricultural use; Villages, housing for seniors and Manabe/Burgstrom, zoned for industrial use.

While city officials are quick to

applaud the careful planning and cohesiveness that went into the growth plan, not everyone sees it that way, particularly residents living on the periphery of the planned growth areas who expressed their opposition at the March 28 City Council meeting.

"I don't feel the love and unity," said Robert Oram who lives near Buena Vista on Old Adobe Road. "People living on the outside of the development are not allowed to vote, but we will be affected," claimed Oram.

Several other speakers followed with complaints regarding a lack of information on the growth project for those living next to it.

Ed Cleveland who lives off Larkin Valley Road objected to the close proximity of large residential project like Buena Vista to the air-

port. "I'll be talking to the pilots association," said Cleveland.

But before Watsonville can begin amending the city's general plan and start annexation, the process must be approved by the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission, otherwise known as LAFCO. When the growth plan reaches LAFCO any property owner whose land is scheduled for development may protest the annexation. If 25 to 50 percent of the landowners owning 25 percent or more of the land disagree with the city's plan, then LAFO will hold a special election exclusive to those living in that area.

In addition to protests by landowners, those living in the surrounding areas who are not able to vote have several opportunities to voice their concerns. The first op-

portunity comes around when the city prepares the environmental impact report and holds a public hearing. More annexation hearings will follow.

Patrick McCormick, executive officer of LAFCO, is responsible for gathering the comments from landowners.

"The general plan amendment and sphere of influence will probably take about two years, it could take longer," predicts McCormick.

Discussion by the City Council on the growth plan is expected to get under way sometime after 6:30 p.m. at the City Council Chambers at 250 Main St.

For a copy of the Orderly Growth & Agricultural Protection Initiative see www.actionpajarovalley.org or call 786-8536. Or contact LAFCO at www.santacruzlafo.org.