

Watsonville is pondering whether to grow up or out

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WATSONVILLE — Watsonville is wrestling with the question of whether to grow up or out as it faces the reality that the city is running out of space.

By the end of 1990, city Planning Director Bud Carney predicts the city will be out of available residential land on which to build. By then the population will number about 30,000, and some 2,750 new housing units will be needed to shelter the people.

But 1990 is only four years away, and the General Plan Steering Committee, which met Wednesday evening at City Hall, is looking further into the future.

The committee, comprising members of the public and private sector, is in the beginning stages of updating Watsonville's General Plan — the blueprint for future development of houses, industry, roads, sewers and just about everything else connected with urban living.

The consensus Wednesday was that Watsonville should not count on "growing up" by increasing density on residential parcels.

At the best, all that does is buy time; at the worst, it may ruin the quality of life for those people already living here.

Carney said that even if the city were to increase density on remaining parcels of land by 30 percent,

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that would accommodate the city's growth only to the year 1993. His predictions are based on the assumption that the city will continue to grow at its present annual rate of 4 percent.

That leaves "growing out," which is sure to be politically difficult, given the land-use policies of the county and Local Agency Formation Commission.

On planning maps, Watsonville is literally ringed by a green belt of agricultural land. Current county and LAFCO policies bar the city from taking in any of that land.

Various ideas are under discussion by the committee. One member, Tony Campos, a realtor and developer who also sits on the Planning Commission, suggested the city consider "leapfrogging" over the agricultural land adjacent to the city to annex parcels farther out on East Lake Avenue.

Roy Ingersoll, a councilman, said that a few years ago city officials were excited about spreading the

city's boundaries toward the ocean — again into agricultural land. He said maybe that should be considered again, given some of the constraints on East Lake Avenue.

No matter where the city looks to expand, there are issues to be resolved. On the east, the Salspuedes Creek is prone to flooding. Other land near there is plagued by "liquefaction," which could turn the land into gelatine during an intense earthquake, said Carney.

What committee members clearly don't want is another San Jose. Yet, according to Carney, the planning going on in Santa Clara County points to Watsonville as an ideal bedroom community for that area.

"The city of Watsonville is going to grow," observed John Kane, chairman of the general plan steering committee. "The question is, do we want it to grow up, or do we want it to grow out."