

Watsonville wants a little bit of Freedom

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3-12-92
WATSONVILLE — This city is eyeing at least part of the Freedom area for annexation.

The City Council voted Tuesday night to begin looking into annexing areas of Freedom that are in county jurisdiction.

Both Freedom Elementary School and Green Valley Mobile

Home Village have requested that the city incorporate them into Watsonville boundaries, hoping to get better fire and police protection.

Council members decided to act immediately on the school and mobile home's requests for annexation, but will survey residents in other areas of Freedom before moving to incorporate residents.

According to Maureen Owens, city planning director, Watsonville residents pay about \$290 less in fees and city utilities per year than those in unincorporated areas.

And response time of law enforcement officers and fire fighters is estimated to be faster in the city than in county areas, Owens said in a memo to council members.

Despite the benefits the city has to offer, the majority of Freedom residents will resist annexation into Watsonville, said one resident.

"When you're looking at this other (Freedom) area, you should really talk to the community," Randy Craven said. "Right now, people are saying they don't want anything to do with the city."

But council members said they would only incorporate areas of Freedom where the residents are willing to become part of the city.

"We're just putting ideas out, trying to get feedback," Councilman Todd McFarren said. "We're asking them what they want."

Councilman Lowell Hurst added that with more information about the benefits of city services, residents will be less apt to resist annexation.

Principal planner Charles Eadie said the city should provide administration for urban areas, and the county should oversee undeveloped areas.

"We need to have a logical boundary and operate as one entity," Eadie said.

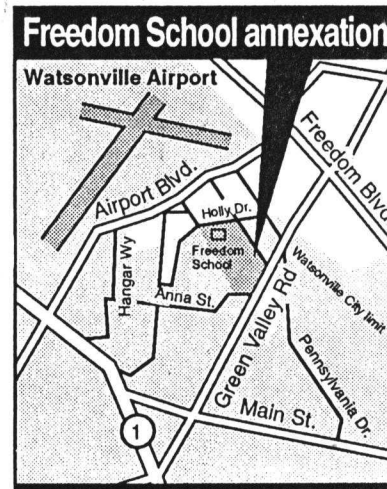
The area being considered for annexation includes 239 homes and about 1,100 people, Owens said.

Though having more residents in the city would generate more taxes, Local Agency Formation Commission executive director Pat McCormick said the annexation wouldn't be profitable for the city once services are extended to the area.

"The city sees this annexation as part of a bigger picture — future annexation and the potential for further growth," McCormick said. "Freedom would get a better level of service with the city, and it might put the city on a better basis when they come to LAFCO."

The city must first consult with the community and make sure the area is consistent with the city's general plan before it goes to the LAFCO, McCormick said.

After the city submits its appli-



Sentinel map

cation to LAFCO, public hearings will be held. A majority of the residents must support the annexation, and if only 25 percent protest the city's action, the incorporation will go through.

If more than 50 percent protest annexation, the city must drop its application. Affected residents will vote on annexation if the number protesting is between 25 and 50 percent.