

# Growth plan gets boost from legislation

Bill will shorten approval process

By MICHAEL SEVILLE  
OF THE REGISTER-PAJAROIAN

Watsonville's long-term planning got a big boost this week when California Gov. Gray Davis signed Assembly Bill 520 into law, giving the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission the authority to authorize the city's general plan of development for the next 20-25 years with a single decision.

"This bill gives LAFCO the distinct authority to approve a multi-year and multiphase series of annexations to the city of Watsonville," said Pat McCormick, executive officer for LAFCO.

The "distinct authority" is unique in that other cities with multiphase general plans would have to return to their specific LAFCO chapter to have each phase approved individually.

AB 520, written by local Assembly Member Simon Salinas, grants the Santa Cruz commission the ability to approve the entire multiphase general plan for Watsonville with one decision.

"We have made it allowable by law for LAFCO to approve the entire annexation for the city of Watsonville," said Emilee Ford, of Salinas' office.

Action Pajaro Valley Executive Director Lisa Dobbins said the organization believes the bill supports the measure that was passed by area voters.

"Action Pajaro Valley felt in general that the legislation was consis-

See GROWTH, page 2

## GROWTH

From page 1

tent with Measure U," she said. "Basically, it describes an orderly growth plan for Watsonville."

Measure U, passed last November with 60.3 percent of the vote, created a long-term plan for the city by designating appropriate geographical areas for urban development over the next 20-25 years with what is called the Urban Limit Line.

One problem is that there are several areas outside of the current Watsonville city limits that may not want to be incorporated into the city. Many residents near Buena Vista Drive off of Highway 1 have been vocal opponents of being annexed into Watsonville and may decide to protest being annexed in the future.

One question they may be asking is whether or not this changes their ability to protest any annexation of their land. The answer is not quite clear.

"A simple answer to the question is that nothing has changed and there remains in law the normal annexation process where people being affected can protest decisions," McCormick said. "If 25 percent of the people decide to protest a decision by LAFCO, the decision will go to a vote."

What is not clear with the new legislation is whether one geographical area protesting a particular phase of the annexation within the plan will stifle the approval of the entire general plan or how it would be understood with regards to AB 520.

If one area of land protests a par-

ticular annexation, how will it affect LAFCO's and the city of Watsonville's decision to approve and move forward with other parts of the general plan?

"We are going through a unique process and the law is unclear at this time how this will be affected by protests," McCormick said.

He said there will be ample time to figure out how to legally handle the situation and that the State Legislature will be in session, should the issue need legislative clarification.

Until then, the main goal of Measure U and AB 520 of providing some certainty to developers and long-term planners will surely be felt. With 20-25 years of growth already being planned and assessed, the future needs of Watsonville should be appropriately addressed if the plan and bill are a success.