

# Watsonville may move on Franich annexation

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WATSONVILLE — While Sacramento politicians try to work out an agreement on an annexation proposal here known as the Franich annexation, City Councilman Dennis Osmer has decided to "throw a wrench" into the debate.

"I've decided to ask the City Council to initiate annexation proceedings," said Osmer, adding that he will seek to have the issue placed on the May 24 council agenda.

By starting annexation proceedings, Osmer hopes to gain control of the political hot potato that has caused a furor between the City Council and county Board of Supervisors, as well as environmentalists and local-government supporters up and down the state.

"The perception is we're acting on the part of Tony Franich and that there are no other considerations," said Osmer. "That's not true."

The Franich annexation landed in the laps of state legislators last week when Assemblyman Dan

Hauser, D-Mendocino, carried a bill that would allow Watsonville to annex Franich's 72-acre apple orchard if Franich agrees to build at least 15 percent of the 600 houses that city zoning would allow there — or 90 units — for low- and moderate-income households.

The city would get a three-acre park, a new storm drain system to alleviate the flooding in the nearby retirement community of Bay Village and a new road if the bill is passed.

The bill outraged Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, and County Supervisor Gary Patton, who saw it as a blatantly political attempt to circumvent the Local Agency Formation Commission.

Six years ago both LAFCO and the City Council approved the annexation, but it was overturned in 1987 by the state Court of Appeals, which ruled that written findings had to be adopted, stating why a partial annexation of the land had been rejected.

Since then, Franich has been seeking other ways to accomplish the annexation without having to ask LAFCO for approval. Franich

maintains that growth-control advocates on LAFCO will deny the application.

Patton and Farr have been trying to negotiate an agreement with Assemblymen Dominic Cortese, D-San Jose, Terry Hannigan, D-Solano, and Hauser, to send the bill back to Cortese's Local Governmental Affairs committee, or allow part of the agricultural property to be annexed.

So far Franich has been unwilling to bend.

Osmer is concerned that the city's position in favor of the Assembly bill will further exacerbate its shaky relations with the county, and that the only viable solution for everyone is to get the issue back in the hands of local officials.

Pajaro Valley Supervisor Sherry Mehl said she's willing to act as a mediator between the city and county. "If the bill doesn't go through, the city will need a mediator with the county. If it does pass, the city will need a mediator with the neighbors who are worried about 600 new houses going on the property," said Mehl. "I feel I need to take a position of neutrality."