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# Planning chief's 'growth strategy'

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Watsonville Planning Director Bud Carney apparently is tired of asking, or having to answer, the question of whether Watsonville can continue to grow without the elimination of agricultural land.

The ever-present question has been asked, and debated, at any number of meetings at City Hall and was a topic of discussion in November's meeting between the City Council and Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

Thus far, the question has only produced disagreement. The city wants to grow. The county wants to preserve "prime" agricultural land.

Both sides want to know what constitutes prime agricultural land.

Carney is tired of "quibbling" over "semantics."

In a memo released Monday to the General Plan Steering Committee, which met last year to devise strategies for accommodating a growing population, Carney has recommended, among other things, a "greenbelt" separating urban and agricultural land in the city.

"This (memo) is a message, a way of facing the issue head-on," Carney said. "All of the efforts going on have been sincere ways in attempting to deal with the question, but ultimately we end up quibbling

over one soil classification or another.

"The greenbelt would be a transition area between what is urban and what is agricultural land."

Carney said the memo is an attempt to start the city on a course of "orderly, efficient and environmentally sensitive" growth. The Planning Commission has reported that 865 acres of vacant land currently exist within the city planning area. Of that acreage, 230 is zoned industrial, 90 commercial, 239 for residential use and the remainder unusable, such as slough areas.

The commission projects that all existing and proposed land zoned for housing will be used up in "three or four years," according to Carney.

"Choices need to be made," he said. "Rather than getting into a lot of semantics, we need to decide where we should and should not grow."

The memo, which constitutes a "new approach" to Watsonville's agricultural land, recommends that the city:

- Stop trying to preserve "prime" agricultural land close to the city's center by "leap-frogging" over and around it.
- Consider elimination of agricultural land preservation as a high priority within the city limits and in those areas

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adjacent to the existing city limits where residential use would be logical.

● Create a peripheral greenbelt which would serve as a multi-use agricultural buffer. Located in this greenbelt could be recreational facilities, a pedestrian and bikeway system, and eventually a fixed-route transit system of some type. The memo said such a greenbelt would serve as an attractive and useful transition area between urban and agricultural uses.

The memo also calls for other changes in the General Plan.

New "directions" include the possibility of residential and commercial development of land west of Highway 1. Carney also wants the General Plan Steering Committee to adopt a population projection of 60,000 to 62,000 for the year 2005, down from the 67,000 figure previously used by the committee.

Carney said the city needs to avoid growing in such a way as to surround "islands" of agricultural land within the city limits.