

Salomon: Annexation crucial for city's future

Industrial park proposed for Riverside property
would have 'dramatic impact' on high jobless rate

By LANE WALLACE

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — A proposed 216-acre industrial park off Riverside Drive could go a long way toward solving the city's chronically high unemployment rate, City Manager Steve Salomon told members of the Santa Cruz County Latino Chamber of Commerce Thursday.

The park would provide about 3,000 jobs and would have "a dramatic impact on the quality of life," Salomon told 25 people at a lunch meeting at Rancho Grande restaurant.

Salomon acknowledged that "there is not unanimity" on the City Council over the project, planned for the agricultural area along Riverside Drive between the city's industrial area and the freeway.

In December, the Council voted 4-2 to take the first steps toward annexing the land into the city, but in January, Councilman Lowell Hurst switched his vote, leaving a 3-3 split. Councilman Tony Campos abstained because he has business interests in the area.

Hurst said he switched because development of an industrial park would take the land out of agricultural production.

The city has hired a consulting firm, DMS Research and Consulting, of Santa Cruz, to prepare a report on the industrial park's impact.

The report isn't due until later this month, but Salomon quoted from what he called an "administrative draft."

The draft says that "If new jobs cannot be created in Watsonville, and the tax base improved to sup-

port basic services, the community's current concerns with residential overcrowding, crime, schools and unemployment will persist and grow."

The City Council will take up the issue again after the report is complete.

Salomon emphasized the overcrowding, handing out graphs and charts to the audience showing that the city has grown from 23,500 in 1980 to 34,250 today.

The current population "doesn't fit" in the already-crowded city, Salomon said.

Watsonville is never going to be a tourist destination like some other cities in the Monterey Bay Area, Salomon said. The city's strength, he said, is its hard-working population and agricultural base.

The city now has 4,000 unemployed people, Salomon said, adding that the unemployment problem — the rate is now 18 percent — cannot be solved with additions of 10 or even 100 jobs at a time.

If the City Council resolves its deadlock and votes for the project, there are additional approvals needed before construction could begin.

The annexation into the city would have to be approved by the Local Agency Formation Commission, a seven-member group of elected public officials from around the county.

There are seven owners of the various parcels that make up the 216 acres. The largest ownership is 94 acres, known as the Manabe-Burgstrom property. The land is

See ANNEXATION, page 3

REFERENCE

ANNEXATION

From page 1

owned by the Manabe family, which runs MS farms, and Bill Burgstrom, a Watsonville real estate agent.

In February, a group called the South County Coalition for Intelligent Planning sued the city, saying there had not been sufficient environmental review of the industrial park proposal. No hearings have been held on the lawsuit.