

City to proceed with annexation

By NANCY BARR

The city of Watsonville is proceeding with an attempt to annex 100 acres in Freedom, despite the opposition of many of the residents of the proposed annexation area.

The annexation matter began when the residents of the Green Valley Mobile Home Park — where the sewers back up every time the power goes out — requested the park be annexed to the city. The Pajaro Valley school district asked that Freedom School, next to the mobile home park, be included in the annexation.

The City Council then had the Planning Department conduct a survey of residents in the neighboring areas to determine if they too were interested in annexation. Although the survey showed that outside the Green Valley Mobile Home Park, 60 percent of the residents opposed it, the council directed the Planning Department to include the expanded area in the annexation proposal.

The expanded area takes in the Colonial Manor Mobile Home Park and all the homes in the area between by Airport Boulevard, Loma Prieta Drive and Holm Road, in addition to the school and the Green Valley Mobile Home Park.

The owner of the Colonial Manor park also asked to be included in the annexation, and the residents there signed a petition in support of it. But the residents later learned they could be subject to rent increases if they were annexed to the city, and testified before the city Planning Commission that they felt they had been duped into signing the petition.

One resident told the commission she signed the petition because she was told they'd get better lighting and police protection if the park was in the city. But she was not told that her rent could also be raised at the owner's whim.

While the county has a rent-control ordinance for mobile home parks, the city does not, and a survey by the city's planning staff shows rents are higher in mobile home parks in the city than they are in the local unincorporated areas.

That informal survey of four parks in the city and four parks outside it showed rents of the latter parks ranged from \$95 to \$208 a month. Rents in mobile home parks in the city ranged from \$174 to \$252 a month.

The City Council last night approved the pre-zoning for the property it is seeking to annex, and decided to apply to the county's Local Agency Formation Commission for approval of the annexation.

A public hearing was held during the discussion on the zoning of the property, but nobody spoke. Mayor Ann Soldo opened and closed the public hearing before the council and staff discussed the particulars of the proposal.

At the end of the council meeting, a man in the audience stood up and told the council he was disappointed that the public hearing had been closed before the issues involved in the annexation were clarified. The mayor responded that she would have reopened the hearing had she realized anyone

wanted to testify on the annexation.

Both the zoning and application for annexation were approved on votes of 4-3. Mayor Soldo and council members Betty Murphy and Vido Deretich were opposed to the annexation plan because it takes in an area whose residents do not want to become part of the city.

"I'm not in favor of the total annexation parcel," Soldo said, adding that she wants the Shady Oaks Drive residential area to be excluded from the annexation.

"With the exception of the Green Valley Mobile Home Park, which has sewer problems, and the school, I don't see anyone knocking at our door to come in," Murphy said.

Murphy also said she was opposed to the pre-zoning of the area because it does not include any parks, which the city is in need of.

After hearing the report that 60 percent of the residents don't want the annexation to go through, Deretich said, "Why did we ever spend five cents of staff time on this? We should have 60-40 for (annexation)."

Council member Frank Osmer said he felt strongly the people in the area should be allowed to vote whether they want to be in the city or not.

"There's a very simple solution (if they don't want annexation)," Osmer said. "All they have to do is vote 'no.'"

The residents will be given the chance to vote on the annexation if LAFCO approves the annexation. The annexation attempt could be halted by LAFCO, or if more than 50 percent of the registered voters in the area sign a petition against annexation.

If neither of those things happens, an election will be held in which the residents of the area proposed for annexation will vote it up or down.

REFERENCE