

# Study required before city can annex orchards

The city of Watsonville needs to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) before it can annex 72 acres of orchards on the east side, says Santa Cruz County Planning Director Kris Schenk.

In a letter to city Planning Director Bob Ellenwood, Schenk says that guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act require that an annexation proposal of that magnitude be accompanied by an EIR before it reaches the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), the county agency that must approve all annexations.

Tony Franich, whose family owns the property, has proposed a mixture of "office commercial" and residential zoning for the property. The city Planning Department has generally agreed with the proposal, except that it would like to see the office use limited to 4½ acres rather than the nine acres Franich has proposed.

In the letter to Ellenwood, Schenk recommends that the city address the following issues in the EIR:

—The effect of the proposed devel-

opment on other agricultural land in the area, including recommendations on how to provide "buffer zones" between developed and agricultural land.

—Commercial land use. The county General Plan, Schenk says, permits professional offices in residential areas because the offices serve as good buffers. But the plan suggests that "active uses" such as banks, large medical offices and clinics not be permitted. But the planning chief says that a "small-scale administrative office project, located adjacent to the East lake Village Shopping Center, would be consistent with this policy."

—Vacant residential land. Schenk points out that a recent EIR on the city's new sewage treatment plant had indicated that the city now has enough vacant land (mostly on the west side) for residential expansion through the year 2000. Says Schenk: "The necessity and desirability of the rezoning and annexation at this particular time is an issue that should be addressed in the EIR."

The city Planning Commission had been set to consider "prezoning" the Franich property (that is, designating how the land would be used if annexed) at its meeting Monday night. But the letter from Schenk throws a monkey wrench in the annexation procedure, since city officials had been expected to give the annexation a "negative declaration," meaning that no EIR would have been required.

Ellenwood said this morning that the Planning Commission would probably have to continue the rezoning request until "the EIR matter has been resolved."

Franich this morning took the news good-naturedly, saying he will pay for an EIR if "that's what's required."

The 72 acres are in the Salsipuedes Sanitation District, meaning Franich has to pay sewer assessment fees. Because the land is in the assessment district, the county General Plan permits development of the agricultural land.