

Deal made on Rodgers House

Historic Houses - South County
Farm Bureau board, city reach agreement for sale

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STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — It seems the future looks bright for a historic home in town.

The Rodgers House has stood for years on its East Lake Avenue site, fulfilling a historical essence in the city of Watsonville. Now, thanks to the declared commitment of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Board of Directors and the Watsonville City Council, it will remain an important historical site for years to come — but not in the same location.

The bureau's board of directors decided in a closed meeting Thursday evening to purchase the house so long as it can iron out legal logistics within 30 days and receive commitment from potential donors to help fund renovations to the house.

Jess Brown, executive director of the farm bureau, said the board "decided they are very much interested in preserving" the house, and was "really interested in helping out the city in getting this thing going."

Plans for the Rodgers House are to move the entire house to a rural site off Larkin Valley and Buena Vista roads, where the house will become a home to offices and a park that will be open to the public.

Members of the Watsonville City Council spoke at length about plans for the house at their meeting Tuesday, including approving \$60,000 to build a road in the undeveloped land where the house will eventually be placed.

Council members expressed concern over the indefinite plans for the house and the potential park that will surround it — though ideas for a turn-of-the-century miniature farm on the site has been thrown around, there is no master plan for the site as of yet.

"Somebody, somewhere along the line should have foreseen this," Councilwoman Betty Bobeda said, noting there are several historic houses within city limits that she said officials will eventually have to consider for preservation. "It's so tentative, we don't really have any-

thing." *WPP 6.27.98*

Bobeda was the only council member to deny the proposal a vote, saying she adverse to spending city money on the project.

"Tonight I cannot vote to spend any money on this project," she said. "I'm not opposed to the project, I'm just opposed to spending any city money on it."

Brown said the board will officially approve the purchasing the house for its \$25,000 price after it has worked out all legal logistics of the deal and is confident that financial support will come from the community.

"Contributions of any size are welcome, and matching grants are certainly encouraged," Brown said. The board's tentative goal is to raise \$400,000, and to receive commitment from potential donors for the amount within 30 days. "This is going to be a fast effort if there is support out there," he said.

With those funds, the farm bureau will be responsible for pur-

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Tarmo Hannula

The Rodgers House at 832 East Lake Ave., Watsonville.

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chasing and renovating the house, as well as providing water and sewer lines to the land. Melanie Kett of the Kett family will pay up to \$70,000 for the actual relocation of the house.

The City of Watsonville is responsible for constructing the access road.

Charles Palmtag, who presented city council with the proposal Tuesday, empathized with council members and encouraged them to approve the proposal. "I know this thing has been thrown on you suddenly, and I know there are costs involved," he said. "But sometimes a project is worthwhile — I think

you just got to take a chance and go for it."

According to city staff reports, land ownership will remain with the City of Watsonville, and title to the house will be held in the name of the farm bureau with the city and Kett having "rights of first refusal."

An agreement between the city, Kett and farm bureau will further delineate community access and use of the building.

Brown said the city has been very cooperative in the entire deal, and that he is "very confident" city officials will remain cooperative in ironing out legal details in the next month. He encouraged anyone interested in donating funds or matching grants to call him at the bureau office at 724-1356.