

# Report advises halving expansion

Watsonville Annexation  
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WATSONVILLE — A recommendation to essentially cut in half the city of Watsonville's proposed additions to its "sphere of influence" was released Friday by Pat McCormick, the executive director of the Local Agency Formation Commission.

Of particular note is the 219-acre Riverside Drive annexation proposal, which would be reduced to 94 acres if the commission heeds the recommendation.

McCormick's recommendation goes to the commission, which is holding a public hearing on the sphere of influence issue Wednesday. The commission will have 70 days after the hearing to render a verdict on the city's proposal. If the proposal is approved, the city could then proceed with its annexation requests.

## LAFCO staff says Watsonville should add 355 acres, not 733

"I'm glad LAFCO is listening to its constituency," said attorney Keith Sugar, who has filed suit against the city trying to block the annexation, which would result in the loss prime agricultural land. "I'm glad it understands the Riverside annexation is a bad idea. Somebody in government is doing the right thing."

Annexation proponents, however, were not pleased. But they feel the commission will make up its own mind, regardless of McCormick's recommendation.

McCormick was on vacation Friday and unavailable for comment.

"We feel the recommendation fails to

address the needs of the city of Watsonville," assistant city planner Charlie Eadie said. "It cuts out the heart of the city's job development strategy and does not give us a significant longterm inventory of vacant land to accomplish nearly what we need to accomplish."

The city had sought to add 733 acres: 300 acres on West Buena Vista Drive; 219 acres on Riverside Drive; 12 acres on North Calabasas Road; 61 on East Atkinson Lane; 122 in wildlife area; and 19 acres on Airport Boulevard.

McCormick recommended adding the following to the city's sphere of influence:

- Riverside Drive area, 94 acres — which includes the Famco and MF Farming properties.

- West Buena Vista, 249 acres.

- Airport Boulevard, 12 acres.

The recommendation calls for a total of 355 acres to be added to the city's sphere of influence. It also recommends that the balance of the proposal, 378 acres, be left alone.

"The recommendation would give the city more short and midterm options for geographical growth," McCormick writes in his report. "The recommendation would also direct urban development away from prime ag lands in a manner consistent with state and local LAFCO policies."

More than 100 acres of the Riverside Drive area was not included in the recommendation, including Greenfarm Ltd., a 13.6-acre parcel owned by Owen Lawlor.

"I think Pat was very cautious in his

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recommendation," Lawlor said. "But I think there will be a lot more discussion about the specifics before they are actually adopted. Obviously I'd love to be included in his recommendation, but I don't think his recommendations will be adopted by the board once all the testimony is taken."

Lowell Hurst, a LAFCO commissioner and also a Watsonville city councilman, prefers to leave it up to the public at Wednesday's hearing. "Half the baby can't live, you have to have the whole baby," he said.

"We're a long way off from a final decision," he added. "Hopefully the public is going to adequately express to the board

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the need of the community."

Hurst and fellow commissioner Ray Belgard, a county supervisor representing South County, have both said they intend to support the city's proposals. The other five members of the board are in doubt as to where they stand.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that the recommendation can be expanded," Hurst said. "Riverside Drive is our No. 1 priority. I think a recommendation had to start somewhere, but this one is a little short of the mark."

Eadie said should the recommendation be adopted, the city stands to lose 1,500 to 2,000 jobs. The city

hopes the full proposal would result in the creation of 3,500 jobs.

"That's significant and direct loss of over \$3 million in revenue to the Watsonville economy," he said.

Wednesday's hearing at Lakeview Middle School begins at 7:15 p.m.