

Council approves plan for growth

Flouridation also moves forward

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Expect to see signature gatherers for the Watsonville Orderly Growth and Agricultural Protection Initiative at a shopping center near you within the next week.

Tuesday night the Watsonville City Council approved the initiative by a vote of five to seven with council members Judy Doering-Nielsen and Richard de la Paz voting against it.

The organization Action Pajaro Valley must now collect 1,200 signatures in order to get the initiative on the November ballot when voters in Watsonville will have the opportunity to make a decision on establishing an urban boundary and controlling development inside and outside the city limits in the next 20 years.

"The state is looking at what happens here in Watsonville to see how to handle this kind of growth," said Daniel Iacofano. Iacofano is from the Bay Area community planning firm responsible for drafting the growth plan.

A lengthy public and council discussion ensued over the growth plan that ranged from emotional, philosophical to pragmatic.

"Our aim right now is we want our input," said Ed Cleveland who lives near the slated development at Buena Vista and spoke out against the initiative. Cleveland was among numerous speakers last night who live outside city limits so they are not entitled to vote, but they live next to planned development. Several of those residents feel they've not been included in discussions on the plan to build more than 4,000 housing units.

According to Cleveland, residents living on the periphery are beginning to form a group and met last Sunday to discuss a strategy for opposing the plan.

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Meanwhile, council member Doering-Nielsen questioned the validity of a council vote on the initiative because three members of the council and the city manager, including Mayor Betty Bobeda, council member Chuck Carter and council member Ana Ventura and Phares serve on the advisory committee for Action Pajaro Valley. "I have serious concerns over whether this council can make an impartial decision," said Doering-Nielsen. She felt the council may be in violation of the Brown Act that mandates specific guidelines on public meetings.

Council Member Rafael Lopez launched a somewhat philosophical dissertation about the growing pains of Watsonville and admonished the county for shoving all housing responsibilities on the city. "I don't agree with everything in this plan, but it's a start," said Lopez.

Following last night's endorsement by the council, Action Pajaro Valley will file the growth initiative with the city clerk this week and legal public notification will appear in the Register-Pajaronian. A signature gathering campaign is expected to follow soon after to put the plan on the November ballot.

In other council news, members voted to approve a grant for \$946,000 from the California Dental Association Foundation for the design, installation and one year operating expense of water fluoridation in the city of Watsonville. Mayor Bobeda and council member Doering-Nielsen voted against acceptance of the grant. Construction on the fluoridation system is expected to begin late this summer or early fall and begin operation next spring.