

LAFCO land decision may be challenged

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WATSONVILLE — At the last Local Agency Formation Commission hearing, the commission gutted the city of Watsonville's request to add land into its sphere of influence, and added insult to injury by proposing conditions limiting future expansion attempts. Watsonville city officials say they are not giving up, however. In fact, they may be fighting back.

City officials consider legal, legislative options

Not only did the commission approve just half of the acreage the city requested, it proposed conditions that would prohibit the city from ever adding any land west of Highway 1. The proposals that were made at the Oct. 1 hearing were called a "disappointment" by city officials.

Watsonville City Manager Carlos Palacios

confirmed Wednesday that the city will consider possible legislative and legal action against LAFCO's conditions, which were proposed by commissioner Mardi Wormhoudt.

Palacios said council members will discuss what the city should do regarding their "legal options," though community mem-

bers may not be kept abreast of their decisions. "It's possible that we'll have it in the closed session," he said. "We're primarily going to talk about the specific land-use properties."

The three conditions proposed by Wormhoudt were the following:

- An analysis of the industrial potential of the approximately 100-acre Landmark

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property, located between Main Street and Highway 1. "If the development potential exists," the condition states, "the land will be rezoned for industrial use" from its current residential zoning status.

- The results of the Watsonville Futures Study, funded by the Packard Foundation, will be evaluated by the city of Watsonville, and a plan for implementation of the recommendations made by the study will be developed.

- The city will enter into an agreement with Santa Cruz County and the Coastal Commission to prohibit future sphere of influence applications by the city of Watsonville for lands west of Highway 1, "unless the city has the concurrence of the other parties to the agreement."

Wormhoudt maintained that the conditions were most appropriate for the city's proposal. "What I think the solution is, is what the commission approved," she said. "The conditions represent a fair way of alleviating community concerns about what Watsonville ultimately wants in its city limits."

LAFCO Commissioner and Watsonville City Councilman Lowell Hurst did not share that sentiment, and has expressed his opposition to the conditions since they were introduced. "We shouldn't have these conditions — there's no reason to put these conditions on," he said. "I don't think LAFCO should control

the internal process of planning for the city of Watsonville."

Hurst said he thinks the city is "certainly willing to participate in the Futures Study," but that it currently "looks like a research paper rather than a study... There needs to be a specific timeline associated with it," which he said it currently does not have.

Wormhoudt said it was likely that other commissioners will meet with the city of Watsonville prior to the next LAFCO meeting — Oct. 29 at 10 a.m. at the Art & History Museum in Santa Cruz — and present written amendments to the proposed conditions. However, she said she expected that "LAFCO will approve the amended map, and approve the resolution."

Hurst said that prior to any concrete decisions being made, it was important to have an open flow of thoughts and concerns about LAFCO's resolution. "There needs to be an opportunity for some public discussion about the conditions," he said. "I think we need to have some open discussion."

Hurst said that he would "prefer not to explore" the legal options the city may have at this point, calling it "premature." However, he said, the city "always has to kind of keep their options open." He added that legal action is "down the road if you can't get any of the conditions to be more reasonable."

Wormhoudt was not concerned. "You can challenge anything you want legally — it doesn't mean you'll get it," she said.