

City starts annexation process

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The Watsonville City Council voted 6-0 to set in motion the process of annexing a neighborhood in Freedom to the city last night.

The council agreed to support the Carnation Drive neighborhood's request for annexation by paying its application fees and initiating rezoning and environmental review procedures.

Councilman Tony Campos abstained from voting because he has property for sale in the neighborhood.

If the annexation is finally approved, residents in the affected area will save money on property taxes and city supplied utility services.

The mixed residential and commercial area, which is adjacent to the Watsonville city limit, is bordered by Green Valley Road, Corralitos Creek and Marigold Avenue.

More than 64 percent of the 140 registered voters in the neighborhood signed a petition carried door to door by Green Valley Road resident Gordon Kobayashi requesting annexation.

Kobayashi had approached Watsonville Planning Director Maureen Owens with the annexation idea a few months ago out of frustration over his dealings with the Santa Cruz County Planning Department.

He said the county department was making it more difficult for him to sell his parents' property because at the time they would not zone it for other than professional office use. He began his annexation campaign when he decided he would have more luck with the Watsonville Planning Department.

"Then we realized there were a lot of reasons to become part of Watsonville," Kobayashi said.

He found support from the
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neighbors he approached initially.

"A lot of people were unhappy with the garbage collection of the county and the response time of the sheriff's department," he said.

The desire to save money was another motivation for many of the neighbors who signed the petition.

"Supposedly, our taxes will come down a bit and there will be better police protection," said Gail Fort, who lives at 290 Marigold Ave.

The neighborhood's cause was aided by a request made by the Local Agency Formation Commission last year that the city annex entire neighborhoods and not just small commercial parcels as it had done in the past. LAFCO is the county agency that formed to promote the efficient delivery of local services by setting policy on boundaries.

Pat McCormick, the executive director of LAFCO, said the irregular existing border doesn't make sense.

"The Freedom Fire Department has to go through Watsonville to get to Freedom and the Watsonville Fire Department has to go through Freedom to get to Watsonville," he said.

By agreeing to sponsor the annexation bid, the city also agreed to pick up the tab for the \$2,300 LAFCO annexation fees. In return the city will receive increased property taxes and various state tax subventions based on population numbers.

Watsonville Finance Director Eric Frost estimated that the state subventions would be about \$50 per person.

Carnation Drive neighborhood residents stand to save about \$220 a year in property taxes and city-run utility services if the annexation is given final approval by LAFCO. County residents pay more special levies collected by the county than city residents.

The annexation process is likely to take at least a year, according to City Manager Steve Salomon.

In other council action:

● The council voted 6-0 to amend the ordinances that set traffic impact fees for development in the west-side area.

West-side property owners who develop only a portion of their property will be allowed to pay only a percentage of the established total traffic impact fee for an individual parcel.

The ordinances were established for specific improvements in the area. These improvements are Highway 1 ramps, Struve Slough Bridge, Watsonville Slough bridge

and the Green Valley/Errington Corridor.

The fees were based on the properties' total acreage and reflected the traffic impact resulting from the development of the affected properties to their full potential.

But the owner of property on Harkins Slough Road who wanted to build only one unit on land zoned for 15 units had protested the ordinances as unfair.

Under the old laws, he would have paid approximately \$64,000 in traffic impact fees. With the amendment, he will be billed less than \$3,000.

● In the least controversial measure surrounding the annexation of land owned by the Franich family to the city of Watsonville thus far, voted 7-0 to finalize the annexation. LAFCO approved the annexation in February and reaffirmed it in April.

Only the owners of the property were allowed to protest during a perfunctory public hearing. Anthony Franich, who has been in favor of the annexation during long years of citywide debate, did not protest the annexation.

The vote also placed the territory in Council District No. 7 and designated the zoning for the property as originally recommended by the Planning Commission back in 1981.