

# Planners support high school site trade-off

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WATSONVILLE — Forget about developing housing on the Tai property and the other lands west of Lee Road.

That's what planning commissioners agreed in a 6-0 vote Monday night to recommend to city leaders. Specifically, commissioners are suggesting that the Watsonville City Council remove from the general plan the special study area designation for the lands, part of which had

been targeted by Tai Associates for development of 1,800 housing units.

The special study designation — assigned to the area in the 1994 General Plan — was a way to reserve the area for development.

John Doughty, the city's community development director, told commissioners developing the land for housing would have been very difficult — if not impossible — because the Coastal Commission would likely have opposed those efforts.

"It serves us better as a commu-

nity to focus our efforts elsewhere than to hang our hats on this property," Doughty said.

Nonetheless, commissioners toyed with making their recommendation contingent on the approval of the high school at the urging of Tai Associates lawyer Omar James. James told commissioners that the city should not have to give up housing in order to get a school.

"If you don't get a high school, you've done a disservice to your community," he said.

City lawyer Alan Smith told commissioners they could not make their recommendation contingent on something they had no control over, however.

Watsonville Wetlands Watch president Jerry Busch and Watsonville Human Rights Committee Matt Bakker and Jerry Thomas of the Community Alliance of Family Farmers voiced their personal support for the action, while Sylvia Previtali and Bernie Feldman said the proposed high school site is unsafe

for students for a variety of reasons.

Although largely a formality, the commissioners' action demonstrates support for the city's effort to encourage members of the state Coastal Commission to approve the building of a high school in the area. Coastal Commissioners and environmentalists sought an enforceable agreement from the city to stop pursuing the development of the land in exchange for supporting the construction of the much-needed school.