

Freedom - Growth

New report aims at slowing Freedom-area growth

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Residential development in the northern Pajaro Valley would be slowed, if not stymied altogether, under a drastic reorganization proposed for the Freedom Sanitation District's boundaries and its sphere of influence.

A new sphere-of-influence study prepared for the Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission recommends that agricultural land on the north side of Amesti Road near Green Valley Road be "de-

annexed" from the sanitation district and that a residential area further up Amesti Road, now outside the district but inside its sphere of influence, be dropped from the sphere.

Likewise, undeveloped land north of Buena Vista Drive would also be dropped and three possible sites for a new high school along north Green Valley Road would also be cut from the district's sphere.

But in each case, they would be left in study areas. LAFCO Executive Director Pat McCormick

said that landowners or developers could present new information to LAFCO that would allow the commissioners to decide to reopen the study and include areas in the district's sphere.

McCormick said he is recommending that the commissioner hold a public hearing on the study Nov. 1.

A sphere of influence sets the boundaries for the future expansion of a city or district. Although inclusion in a sphere does not mean an area will be annexed, an area cannot be annexed unless it

is already in a sphere.

In Santa Cruz County, access to a sewer system means profit for a land developer. The county has a one-acre minimum lot size for new homes served by a septic system. With a sewer system, the development density can be much greater. In the case of homeowners along Amesti Road, some are dealing with failing septic tanks and need to find an alternative for disposing of their sewage. Hooking up to the Freedom Sanitation District's trunk line, which now ends on Amesti

Road near Amesti School, is one possibility — albeit expensive.

The study grew out of a deal made between the Board of Supervisors, who are also the sanitation district directors, and environmental groups several years ago to re-examine the district's sphere of influence after construction of a new sewer trunk line.

As part of that deal, McCormick said, the district filed an application in 1988 with LAFCO to detach or de-annex several large agricultural parcels along

the north side of Amesti Road.

"The district said, 'We will open up sewer capacity in the Freedom area but since there are areas not planned for sewer service, it is best to get them out of the district so they won't paying for service they won't be able to get,'" McCormick said.

The application prompted a new look at the district's sphere of influence, completed in 1975, "when we were still trying to figure out what spheres of influ-

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and were all about," McCormick said.

McCormick said the Amesti Road residents faced with failing septic systems have three options under the scenarios presented by the new study.

- They can convince the Board of Supervisors to allow them to hook up to the sanitation district sewer lines.

- They can turn to the county's proposed County Service Area 12, which is a septic tank management district, to set up a community leach field system for the area. A community leach field, McCormick said, collects the wastewater from individual septic tanks and pipes it through

a main sewer system to a large leach field nearby.

"If there can't be an on-site solution," McCormick added, "then the simplest solution is to keep everybody's septic tank in the ground and then run lines to connect them to a common leach field. But you still need someone to put it together and determine where it will be."

- The third option is to pump sewage out of septic tanks and haul it away.

A last option, being considered in some parts of the San Lorenzo Valley, is to set up small "package" sewage-treatment plants. Regulatory agencies don't like this alternative, the LAFCO di-

rector said, but if properly operated they can do a good job at cleaning up wastewater.

The sphere-of-influence report may only contain short-term solutions, McCormick added. Right now, he said, the Pajaro Valley school district is preparing an environmental impact report on the Green Valley high school site. Several developers are looking at the Buena Vista Drive property and the county is gearing up to solve local septic problems.

"There is progress on all fronts," McCormick added, "but the consultant didn't feel we have enough information now to include some of these areas in the sphere of influence."