

Watts Grove - Annexation Franich land annexation in final stage

The proposed annexation of 72 acres owned by Tony Franich to Watsonville will go before the county agency that has final say on the matter tonight.

Franich has been trying for 12 years to annex his property on East Lake Avenue, next to the East Lake Village Shopping Center. Tonight's hearing before the Local Agency Formation Commission is the final hurdle.

Public testimony will be heard at 7 p.m. at the Alianza School gym on Arthur Road in Watsonville. A large turnout is expected.

LAFCO could choose to vote on the annexation tonight, but Executive Director Pat McCormick is recommending that action be delayed until the agency's regular meeting June 9.

Franich has promised to donate nine acres on which the city plans to build 180 to 270 low-income housing units.

Under the agreement, the remaining acreage will be developed as "maximum residential densities for efficient land use" with a target of 394 to 577 housing units.

Franich also agreed to donate eight acres for a park and to sell seven more acres to the city.

Annexation opponents want the property preserved for agricultural use and say the proposed development threatens sensitive wetlands. Others charge the proposed land use will create a domino effect of development around the annexed property.

Supporters say the annexation would be a start in meeting the city's critical need for affordable housing.