

# Watsonville moves closer to vote on annexation

City clerk validates signatures on petitions; vote could come in June



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Watsonville's boundary-extension proposal includes adding the area that contains the Redman-Hirahara House and the Chevron station on the west side of Highway 1 along Lee Road.

By DONNA JONES

djones@santacruzsentinel.com

**WATSONVILLE** — A proposal to extend Watsonville's boundaries to include properties on both sides of Highway 1 near the Riverside Drive exit could come before voters as early as June.

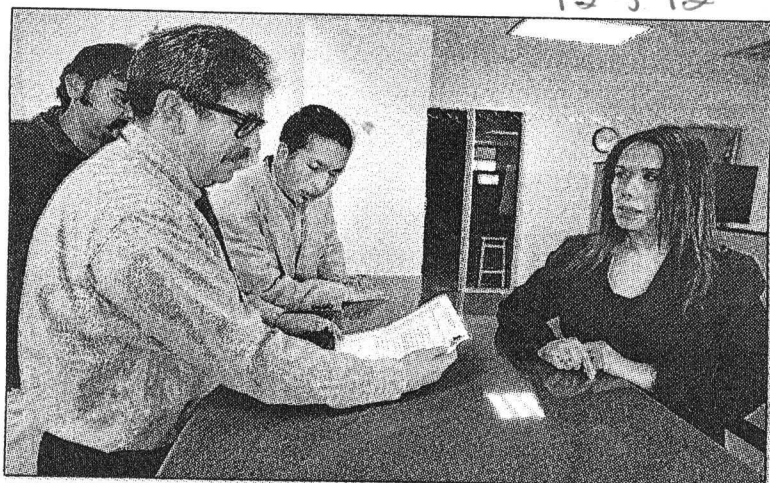
Watsonville City Clerk Beatriz Flores has certified that a campaign to put the question on the ballot gathered the required number of signatures from registered voters.

The certification moves forward Councilman Daniel Dodge's proposal to amend Measure U, the city's growth ordinance, to gain land for commercial development. But, even if voters approve, hurdles remain, most significantly clearing the proposal with a regional body overseeing annexations.

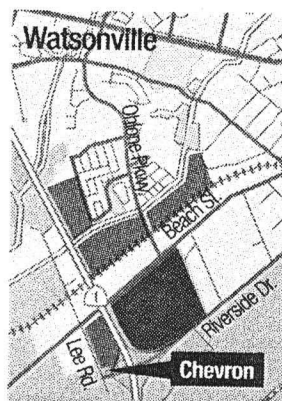
Dodge wasn't fazed by the work ahead as he picked up the official certification report Tuesday.

"There's no other step without this one," he said.

Dodge wants the city to annex 80 acres of farmland, known as the Sakata-Kett property, on Riverside Drive on the east side of the freeway, as well as the Chevron station and historic Redman-Hirahara House along Lee Road on the west side. He envisions a big-box retail development that could provide jobs and sales taxes to bolster the city's budget.



Councilman Daniel Dodge proposes city annexation of Sakata-Kett, GreenFarm and Chevron properties. The city annexed the Manabe-Ow property in 2006.



- Sakata-Kett
- Manabe-Ow
- GreenFarm / Redman-Hirahara

ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL  
Daniel Dodge picks up the certification of the Watsonville annex petition from Watsonville City Clerk Beatriz Flores on Tuesday. The annexation would include 80 acres of farmland and the Redman-Hirahara House property.

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# WATSONVILLE

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The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau opposes the move to pave over productive farmland, and both South County representatives to the county Board of Supervisors have criticized the proposal, which they say would hurt the city's small business.

Thomas Karn, who heads up the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture's government committee, said the organization is remaining neutral for the time being. He said the group planned to provide a venue for discussion on the issue before taking a stand. But he congratulated the signature gatherers.

"It's a lot of hard work to get signatures," Karn said. "It's a commendable effort in itself."

The group collected 2,206 signatures. Flores certified at least 1,504 — the minimum required — were valid.

## AT A GLANCE

### WATSONVILLE GROWTH

**WHAT:** Proposal to amend Measure U, a 2002 initiative that restricted Watsonville expansion to the areas of Atkinson Lane and Buena Vista Road, and to the Manabe-Ow property along the east side of Highway 1 between West Beach Street and Harkins Slough Road; approved by 60 percent of city voters.

**WHY:** Amendment would allow Watsonville to pursue annexation of farmland along Riverside Drive and the Chevron station and Redman-Hirahara property on Lee Road for commercial development.

**WHO:** At least 10 percent of the city's registered voters signed a petition requesting the proposal be put to a vote.

**WHEN:** The City Council is expected to decide early next year on a date for the election, which must be held by November 2014 but could be set for as early as June.

Under the city charter, voters must be given the chance to weigh in at the next regular municipal election in November 2014, but Flores said the City Council could decide to schedule a vote as early as June.

Dodge said during the campaign, voters expressed a sense of urgency,

asking when ground could be broken for development. He supports a vote in 2013, but noted it's not his decision alone.

"That's for the City Council to decide," Dodge said.

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Watsonville's proposed expansion plans would include the Chevron station on the west side of Highway 1 along Lee Road.