

Watsonville wins battle over dump expansion

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Watsonville got over another hurdle this week in its plan to expand the city dump off San Andreas Road.

The state Coastal Commission Tuesday rejected an appeal that would have prevented a land division needed to expand the dump, said Dave Koch, Watsonville's Assistant Public Works Director.

Without the expansion, it is estimated the city's landfill would be filled to capacity in about two years, Koch said. The expansion would increase its life expectancy by 15 years, he said.

The city began moving toward expansion about five years ago, when it purchased part of a 265-acre parcel adjacent to the dump, Koch said. The agreement at the time was to split the land into two parcels, the smaller one — of 53 acres — going to the city.

Since the land is in the coastal zone, however, the city had to follow the Coastal Commission's procedure for minor land divisions, Koch said. That meant that although the county, acting as the local coastal agency, granted permission in January for the division, it was a decision that could be appealed to the state.

The Sierra Club and a member of the Higaki family, which owns a house near the landfill site, moved to block the land division with arguments based on environmental concerns.

Koch was one of several city officials who journeyed to San Diego this week for a hearing on the appeal. Others included Planning Director Bud Carney, City Attorney Don Haile and Councilman Rex Clark.

The Coastal Commission found no "substantial issue" has been raised, and denied the appeal, Koch said.

Said Councilman Dennis Osmer: "I think the appeal was weak. I think that we do an excellent job at our landfill."

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lems, he said, is the county's landfill off Buena Vista Drive, separated from the city's dump by railroad tracks. While only city trucks are allowed to dump garbage at Watsonville's landfill, the county's is open to the public seven days a week and therefore poses much more of a hazard, Osmer said.

Koch agreed, saying, "We feel we have better control over what goes into our site as far as toxics that may be illegally dumped."

The city's design for its landfill expansion, and the protective measures it already practices, will neutralize a number of concerns, such as the issue of groundwater protection raised by Art Higaki, Koch said.

Coastal commissioners "made it clear that they wanted to make sure that we did address all these concerns in our design," he said.

Protection of groundwater against contamination is built into the design as a matter of course, Koch said. Clay liners are currently used in landfill areas to collect any water that comes in contact with garbage, he said, and the water is then

trucked to the city's wastewater-treatment plant.

In addition, the city will lose some of its expansion capacity in creating a 200-foot buffer between its property and the Higaki house to minimize any impacts on the family, Koch said.

"Let's face it," he said, "nobody likes living next to a landfill."

The city is also moving toward a recycling program that could go a long way toward extending the life of its landfill. The council approved an \$11,000 study in May that could be a precursor to recycling.

"It tells us how much potential we have in terms of recycling," Koch said.

Workers will hand-sift samples of residential and commercial garbage from at least 20 trucks, separate the materials such as plastics and cardboard, and then calculate the percentages of the various materials, Koch said.