

Historic-house plans hit LAFCO snag

Historic Houses - South County
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WATSONVILLE — Plans to restore a crumbling, turn-of-the-century home into a tourist destination may have hit a snag.

The Redman House Committee, a non-profit group seeking to revive an 1897 home built by celebrated Watsonville architect William Weeks, wants to turn the property into a visitor-serving facility highlighting Pajaro Valley history and attractions.

To make the project a reality, the committee wants Watsonville to annex the 13-acre property to secure the needed city services, like water and police protection. The project also needs a change in zoning — from agriculture to commercial use.

But at Wednesday's Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission meeting,

Wormhoudt frowns on annexing Redman House, west of Highway 1

agency chair Mardi Wormhoudt said she does not support annexation of the parcel because it lies west of Highway 1, which divides Watsonville from sensitive coastal and agricultural land.

While she said she supports a controversial plan to build a high school west of the highway, Wormhoudt said the location of the Green Farm raises a red flag.

"As a LAFCO member, I'm not particularly sympathetic to annexing land west of Highway 1," said Wormhoudt, who also represents Santa Cruz on the county Board of Supervisors.

LAFCO is charged with protecting farmland and regulating city annexations, among other duties.

Annexation of the land became an issue last month in multi-party negotiations over a proposal to build a third Pajaro Valley high school. To win approval for the site, Watsonville officials agreed to forego future annexations west of Highway 1. But the Redman House property, also known as the Green Farm, was purposefully excluded from the agreement.

Watsonville officials have argued annexation is logical because the land is bound on

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two sides by the city.

Tony Campos, a LAFCO member and Watsonville-area supervisor who participated in the high school talks, said he supports leaving Green Farm available for annexation because of the Redman House restoration project and because it is surrounded by city land.

The house is visible from Highway 1 and is located off West Beach Road.

Watsonville City Manager Carlos Palacios has said the city has had a long-term interest in annexing the land and supports some kind of tourist use of the property. The land was part of a failed 1977 annexation of 681 acres.

The Redman House Committee has an option to buy the property for \$2.4 million. Restoring the house and related costs would bring the total to \$4 million. The group is currently trying to raise money for the project.