

# Watsonville residents say farming is their top priority

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WATSONVILLE — A survey of area residents proves what many have thought for some time: Preserving agricultural land and the farming industry is among local residents' top priorities.

Also high on the list, according to the survey, are allowing development only if public facilities are adequate and widening roads where needed.

Area residents don't want a new regional shopping center or development on prime agricultural land adjacent to Watsonville.

The survey was done as part of the city's update of its General Plan — the document that will be the city's blueprint for development for the next 20 years. Some 753 people responded, half of them residents of Watsonville, 24 percent who live within a mile of the city limits, 22 percent business owners and 41 percent employed in the city.

The ethnic makeup of the respondents was disproportionately skewed to the white population (69.5 percent were white). Consequently, city Planner Pat Dellin said more weight should be given to the response of Hispanics (18.9 percent of the survey, 49 percent of the population) and Asians (2.5 percent of the responses, 5.5 percent of the population).

Hispanics ranked creating new jobs, beautifying the city and developing more park and recreation facilities as their top three pri-

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orities. They opposed developing an 18-hole golf course and discouraging population growth by limiting housing, commercial and/or industrial growth.

The survey listed 30 statements with which respondents were to answer by saying they agreed strongly, agreed somewhat, had no opinion, disagreed somewhat or disagreed strongly.

The strongest support was for the statement that development should be allowed only if public facilities are adequate, followed closely by the consensus that roads should be widened where needed.

If broken down by issues, the survey shows the following:

- **Agriculture:** Preservation of farm land and the industry are high priorities, but respondents also thought that the city should diversify its economic base, indicating a "dual approach to economic development," according to Dellin.

- **Population growth:** There was

general agreement that the city should allow development of new multi-family buildings, but respondents were decidedly against "slow-growth" land-use policies. Also, respondents didn't want the city to expand its boundaries to prime agricultural land.

- **Housing:** Respondents want a variety of housing, not just single-family or multi-plexes. But respondents didn't want more units built behind existing housing.

- **Downtown:** Revitalization of downtown is a high priority, but people were split on the question of converting Main Street into a two-lane, semi-mall. A majority of people favored a multi-level parking structure downtown.

- **Traffic:** Existing roads should be widened where necessary and new development should only be allowed if schools, roads, parks, sewers and other public facilities are adequate, a vast majority of respondents said. Also, people favored building new through-streets to connect existing and future neighborhoods.

- **Parks:** Although there was strong opposition to a new 18-hole golf course, people generally favored more parks, recreation facilities and athletic fields.

- **Beautification:** Strong support was shown for beautifying the city and planting more landscaping.

- **Other:** People support additional library services, especially Hispanics and Asians, who expressed stronger support of that issue than whites.