

# Franich decision on hold

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STAFF WRITER

Tony Franich's 12-year fight to annex his East Lake Avenue land to Watsonville and develop it will go at least one more round.

The Local Agency Formation Commission, which holds the power of approval on Franich's application, was hoping a four-hour meeting last night would accommodate all the people who wanted to speak.

It wasn't even close. When commissioners stopped the meeting at 11 p.m., there were still 30 people signed up to speak who hadn't been heard. The commission decided to hold another hearing June 14, at a site in Watsonville to be determined.

The meeting at the Alianza School gym drew about 275 people, and the prevailing sentiment was mainly against Franich.

About three quarters of the speakers were against the annexation, and many in the audience had cards saying "Don't sell out for 9 acres. No on Franich"

## Emotions run high on all sides of issue

Watsonville City Councilman Al Alcalá created a small stir at last night's Franich-annexation meeting when he urged the 100 or so Spanish-speakers in the audience to think for themselves.

"Don't let people misguide you," Alcalá said. "Are you going to let a few people who suddenly become leaders be your leaders?"

He said groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Community Action Board should not

be speaking for the community.

Alcalá told the workers, most of whom wore "No On Franich" tags, that they should hope their children can attain a better lot in life than picking strawberries.

Alcalá's statements were challenged later in the meeting by several speakers.

Alcalá's painting of LULAC and the Community Action Board as outside groups was a "weak propaganda device," said City Councilman Todd McFarren, who spoke against the an-

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LAFCO's approval, came after years of approvals, denials and legal wrangling.

Franich has also agreed to give the city three acres for a park and sell the city seven more acres. The property is next to East Lake Village shopping center.

Franich has also talked with the Pajaro Valley school district about selling land for an elementary school, and the district is trying to secure funds for the state to build the school.

Annexation proponents say the annexation will provide housing and a park that will more than offset the loss of the land from agriculture. It had once been an apple orchard, and is now planted in berries.

Opponents argued that taking the land out of agricultural use would reduce jobs for farm workers, and that the project would create congestion problems.

Several residents of the Bay Village and Pajaro Village retirement communities on the city's east

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pinned to their shirts.

Franich has worked out a deal with the city of Watsonville to give the city nine acres for low-income housing, in exchange for being

able to develop the rest of the property to "maximum residential densities," with a target of 394 to 577 housing units.

The deal, contingent on

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side said a plan to extend Bridge Street if the Franich project goes through would destroy their tranquility.

"Please, no more traffic," said resident Douglas McKinney.

Mary Lemos, a Watsonville resident since 1929, said she made her living in the fields.

"What will happen to the families if we use farm land for homes?" she said.

Nearly half of the speaking time was taken by public officials, who argued the majority and minority views of the city's agreement with Franich.

Mayor Oscar Rios said the agreement with Franich gives the city an opportunity to help reduce a long-standing shortage of housing. Up to 270 low-income apartments could be built on the site, he said.

"We cannot afford to wait for the perfect development site," Rios said.

Devoting the entire acreage to affordable housing would not be financially feasible, Rios said in response to a question from LAFCO member Gary Patton.

City Councilman Todd McFarren, an opponent of the agreement, suggested LAFCO delay its decision until the city completes

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nexation.

"There's nothing wrong with manual labor," said Councilman Lowell Hurst, who also spoke against the annexation.

Pedro Castillo, vice president of the Pajaro Valley chapter of LULAC, said, "We're not outsiders. We live and work here." The Pajaro Valley, he said, "was built on the backs of farm workers."

LULAC, Castillo said, has had a chapter in Watsonville since 1981. Community Action Board Executive Director Christine Johnson-Lyons didn't address LAFCO, but said after the meet-

ing her agency has a Watsonville office.

Annexation applicant Tony Franich had pointed words for LAFCO member Gary Patton, a long-time opponent. Franich was angry that Patton had earlier inquired whether all five property owners, all relatives of Franich, had signed the agreement with the city.

"The implication that I would cheat the city is an insult to my family," said Franich, raising his voice. His family started farming in the Pajaro Valley more than 80 years ago, said Franich, 81.

"We bought and sold apples on a handshake," he said.

Franich said he had the authority to speak for his family members.

—Lane Wallace

its General Plan later this year. Councilman Lowell Hurst, another opponent, told LAFCO, "There are other alternatives that need to be fully considered."

The new General Plan is likely to have a revised sphere of influence (for the city's future expansion) which could point to new areas of development as an alternative to the Franich development.

One area that could come into the city's sphere is Buena Vista, which the environmental impact report for the Franich project discussed as an alternative to developing Franich's land.

Franich, speaking at the end of the meeting, said every alternative site considered is agricultural land.

"Half of Buena Vista is prime land," Franich said. "No matter where you go, it's agricultural land."

He accused his detractors of being NIMBYs — Not In My Back Yard — and said the Pajaro Village retirement community is on farm land.

Franich said his site is adjacent to the city and would be easy to develop. The Buena Vista site, he said, is three miles outside the city limits.