

# Watsonville sees Buena Vista tract as prime area for housing

## City plan would be latest in string of annexations

Watsonville - Annexation

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WATSONVILLE — City officials are hoping that annexation can help ease Watsonville's growing pains.

Faced with a dearth of housing, jobs and land for new businesses, the city is pursuing several plans to expand its boundaries.

The latest property the city is hoping to annex is a 246-acre tract to the northwest, known as the Buena Vista area. Sparsely developed, it is north of Watsonville Airport and bisected by Buena Vista Road east of Highway 1.

If approved by the City Council and Santa Cruz County Local Area Formation Commission, the annexation would provide land for as many as 400 new homes.

The City Council gave the Community Development Department the go-ahead to begin the annexation process this week. The council had three annexation boundaries to choose from and selected the largest because it would maximize the development potential and form a logical extension of the city limits.

City planners said LAFCO is likely to support the plan because it concentrates

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development away from prime agriculture areas.

The Buena Vista area is identified in Watsonville's general plan as an area for potential residential expansion. The area also contains a city-owned parcel that is proposed for use as a regional park.

While LAFCO agreed in 1997 to put the area into Watsonville's sphere of influence for planning purposes, the county-wide agency still has veto power over any annexation.

Associate city planner Mari Alsip said the annexation would go a long way to alleviate the city's lack of housing.

"We are simply out of housing," she said. City Manager Carlos Palacios said as long as Watsonville remains an agricultural area, the demand for workers will create a demand for housing.

"We just need more land," he said. "That's the bottom line."

Following the council's vote to move forward with the annexation, city staff will prepare a land-use plan to examine future housing density and infrastructure needs.

Dave Williams, director of Watsonville's Community Development Department, said many of the city's previous annexations have been a "wash" in terms of adding revenue to the city. Though the landowners must pay city taxes, the city has to provide services.

But in the case of larger, undeveloped parcels such as Buena Vista, the 1994 annexation of the 172-acre Franich property and the proposed Manabe-Burgstrom annexation, annexation is viewed as a plus for the city because the property increases the city's tax base and housing stock.

"The Franich and Buena Vista parcels are really important to the city," he said.

While the city has identified the Buena Vista area for future residential expansion, Alsip said the property owners must support the plan for it to go forward.

"If they decide they don't want us then we don't want them," she said. "We're not going to force them."