

# Business council backs city's Riverside annexation

Watsonville - Annexation WRP-822-97  
CEOs from around the county vote to support Watsonville's plan

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**WATSONVILLE** — The Santa Cruz County Business Council has voted to support the Riverside land annexation proposed by the city of Watsonville. The project is at the center of controversy over growth in the community.

The entire membership of the council, which includes leaders of the most prominent businesses in the county, was polled last week and voted almost unanimously in favor of the proposed annexation. According to James Conklin, executive director of the council, 80 percent of the membership voted with 48 votes in favor and only seven opposed.

"The decision to annex prime farm land is not an easy one," Conklin said in a prepared statement. However, he said, "the ba-

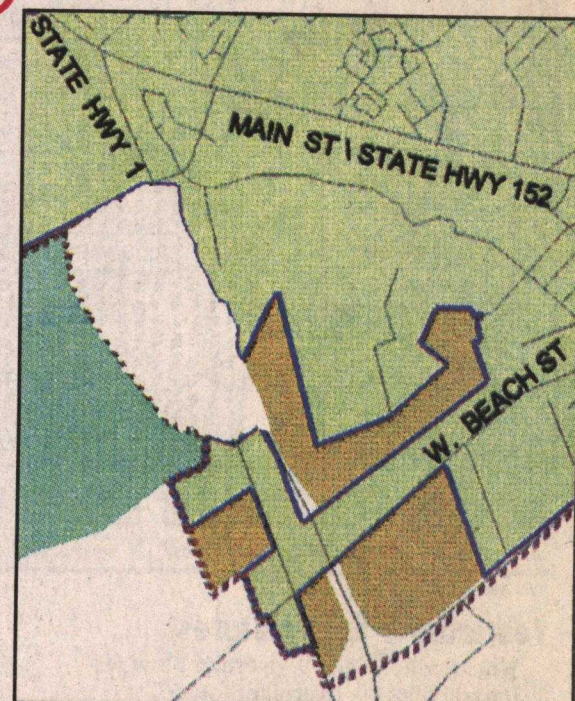
sic need for jobs for the Watsonville population was paramount."

The city's proposal to annex 216 acres of farmland in the southwest corner of town has been a controversial issue among city council and community members for several years. Parts of the proposal are still in litigation and no plans to develop the property have been made yet. City officials would like to develop an industrial park on the property.

The decision came after the business council sponsored a forum to discuss all aspects of the proposed annexation Aug. 8 in Rio Del Mar. The forum was attended by business and political leaders from around the county.

Pros and cons of the proposal were presented, and the council's members were polled the following week.

See ANNEXATION, page 8



City of Watsonville

The four sections of the proposed Riverside annexation are highlighted in gold.

## ANNEXATION

From page 1

Conklin stated that there were several factors in the council's decision, including Watsonville's high unemployment rate and low incomes, "a rising youth population, lowered tax revenues to support city services and a deteriorating educational level."

He also noted that the state-approved program recently established in the city, the Watsonville Enterprise Zone, "was a strong motivation in this decision." The program, which was established May 1, aims to stimulate Watsonville's economy and create more jobs by providing benefits to employers and business owners located within zone boundaries. If the city's proposal is approved, the annexed land will become a part of the Enterprise Zone.

"I think it'll show that county-wide businesses have made an informed decision," said council board member Kurt Kniffin of Granite Construction Co. "It should have a great impact because the business council represents

thousands of workers."

Council member Tom Johnson of Rocky Franich Ford said he hopes the decision will influence the opinions of community members. "I'm in favor (of the proposal) because it's going to bring needed jobs to the area," he said. Johnson added that, as a pro-business organization, the council hopes the annexation "will bring higher levels of jobs in."

The council, which was organized two years ago, is comprised of chief executive officers, presidents and regional managers of private sector businesses in Santa Cruz County. Members include top executive officers of Watsonville Community and Dominican hospitals, local food companies such as Dean Foods and Monterey Mushrooms, and car dealerships such as Toyota of Santa Cruz and Ocean Chevrolet.

According to the council, its goal is to collaborate the resources of talent among local business and professional leaders in order to assist the public community in identifying, examining and resolving countywide issues.