

Whiskey Hill annexation is official

Watsonville, Annexation
After 60 days, the core
of Freedom will become
part of Watsonville

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✓ **WATSONVILLE** — More than 100 years ago, the area was known as Whiskey Hill, but with Tuesday's unanimous vote by LAFCO board members, the historic core of the Freedom area will soon be known as a part of the city of Watsonville.

The annexation approval brings nearly 2,000 residents living in 600 homes on 120 acres into the city, making it the largest annexation in terms of population in the 35-year history of the Local Agency Formation Commission, said Executive Director Patrick McCormick.

"The city has been pursuing the annexation at the request of the neighbors since 1995," Watsonville Assistant City Manager Marcela Tavantzis.

Residents could officially become part of the city by June. Before the annexation is complete, the city must negotiate a service agreement with the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District, hold a public hearing at which people against the annexation can speak out, and wait another 60 days in case anything else pops up, according to conditions LAFCO placed on the move.

Although the fire district currently contracts with the Watsonville Fire Department to provide some fire services, negotiations will finalize a long-term arrangement giving the city responsibility for the annexed area. Officials described the arrangement as still being "a serious issue."

What is being called the Freedom-Carey annexation completes a patchwork of nine parcels along Freedom Boulevard and Green Valley Road the city has incorporated since 1993, city Administrative Services Director Eric Frost said.

The area includes parcels along Carey Avenue southwest of Freedom Boulevard and the Freedom Shopping Center at the corner of Freedom and Airport boulevards.

Total income to the city will be less than \$72,000, just about enough to cover costs of city police and fire service, street repair and other needs, Frost said.

The commercial area was included in the annexation to provide enough tax revenue to make up for the residential area's net drain on city coffers. The county will still keep less than 12 percent of the taxes it receives from the area in an agreement worked out with the city, helping to fund health and welfare programs in the area, Frost said.

City officials may invest redevelopment funds into infrastructure in the area, Tavantzis said.

Two large, undeveloped parcels were not included in the annexation. City and Santa Cruz County officials are working on building affordable housing there using county redevelopment funds; the city would annex the parcels when construction is finished, Frost said.

The Freedom-Carey annexation follows a series of bruising encounters last year between city and LAFCO leaders over Watsonville's bid to annex 94 acres of farmland to build an industrial park.

In comparison, this annexation "was a lovefest of government cooperation," McCormick said. "It's nice to have an easy one."