

Pajaro annexation won't come soon

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WATSONVILLE — Pajaro will not become part of this city any time soon.

But that doesn't mean Watsonville doesn't care about its neighbor.

The City Council kicked around the idea of annexing Pajaro on Tuesday night, but no serious proposal for annexation resulted. Council members did say, however, that Watsonville will continue to help Pajaro recover from the March 11 flood that chased 3,500 people from their homes and businesses.

A broadly stated motion by Councilman Dennis Osmer passed 4-3 to keep the annexation idea alive. City staff will work with Pajaro residents to study annexation. The motion also states that Watsonville will support Pajaro to gain better representation from local government.

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Pajaro have been neglected by Monterey County officials. As with the flood, Watsonville has come to the aid of Pajaro and supported the town of mostly farm workers in efforts to repair the Porter Bridge and improve public safety services.

But some people at Tuesday's meeting felt that talk of annexation might be premature. A motion by Councilman Al Alcalá to table the topic of annexation lost 4-3.

Earlier, two Pajaro residents and one business owner spoke in favor of annexation.

Luz Hernandez said she visited 69 homes following the flood. Resi-

dents favor becoming part of Watsonville, she said.

Diane Young, a Pajaro business owner and community activist, said it is not yet time to get serious about annexation. People are still cleaning up after the flood. Their immediate concerns are not political representation, she said.

"Right now everybody needs to take a deep breath and step back" from the cleanup, Young said.

The unincorporated town rests on the Monterey County side of the Pajaro River. Many residents live in Pajaro and work in Watsonville or south Santa Cruz County.

No one attempted to explain benefits that annexation would provide the city. Young said the tax base is small in Pajaro. Annexation would be more of a community service to the people of Pajaro. They would gain city services like police and fire protection and public works improvements.

The road to annexation, at least for Pajaro, would require nothing short of an act of Congress — at the state level, anyway.

The state Constitution prohibits any annexation between county lines. A change in state law would be needed to bring the north Monterey County hamlet into the Watsonville fold.

It was unclear Tuesday night how Monterey County feels about a possible loss of Pajaro.

Monterey County Supervisor Tom Perkins, who represents Pajaro, was not represented at Tuesday night's meeting.

If annexation is to become a serious topic, Pajaro residents will have to carry the ball.

"It has to come from the folks who live and work on the other side of the river," said City Manager Steve Salomon.