

City considers de-annexing land on West Side

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The City Council Tuesday night considered giving 125 acres of land back to Santa Cruz County, but eventually decided against it.

The land, which lies west of the freeway between Harkins Slough Road and Airport Boulevard, is in the state Coastal Zone and thereby subject to state regulation, and some council members didn't feel it was worth the hassle of dealing with the state.

"If we don't (give it back) then we're going to need two more Chris Kahrs to pt up with the state coastal department," commented Councilman Vido Deretich. (Ms. Kahr is a consultant employed by the city.)

Councilman Frank Osmer also maintained that it would be best to "de-annex" the land and let the county deal with the state.

But Mayor Bill Johnston, who has often said that he'd like to see the whole Pajaro Valley annexed to the city of Watsonville, strongly disagreed.

"If you owned that property, would you want to go under the (control) of Gary Patton?" asked the conservative mayor, referring to the liberal North County supervisor.

A better way of dealing with the

property, said Johnston, would be to zone the acreage agricultural. That, he argued, would satisfy the state and allow the land to stay under the control of the city.

More than half of the 125 acres is now being farmed, and the remainder is vacant. No urban services are available.

The discussion of the acreage took place at a council study session regarding a draft of the Local Coastal Program. Local jurisdictions are being required to come up with plans that meet state Coastal Act criteria. Once the plans are accepted by the state Coastal Commission, the jurisdictions will be allowed to issue their own building permits in the Coastal Zone, rather than having the regional coastal commissions issue them.

The city of Watsonville is not affected to any large extent by the Coastal Act of 1976. Only 221 acres of the city lie within the coastal boundaries. Two of the five areas within the zone involve city-owned property: the city dump on San Andreas Road and the sewage treatment plant on Beach Road.

The council agreed Tuesday night to enlist the support of State Sen. Henry Mello and Assemblyman Sam Farr to remove the dump and treatment plant from the Coastal Zone.

Removing the treatment plant from the zone, said Councilman Osmer, was particularly important because of the expensive improvements that will have to be made at the plant within the next several years. He said the state Coastal Commission had been constantly hard to deal with on sewage matters.

Toward the end of the meeting, Mayor Johnston took the opportunity to get in a few nasty words about the Coastal Commission.

"I didn't vote for it because I don't believe it's democratic," he grumbled. "We should tell them to go to (pause) and stay there."

Nevertheless, the council gave tacit approval to a draft of the Local Coastal Program after making several minor changes. Final action on the program is expected to come within a few weeks.

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