

Supervisors support legislation limiting farmland annexation

Watsonville - annexation WRP 12-10-98

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SANTA CRUZ — State legislation proposed by Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors could have severe consequences for developing on farmland.

The supervisors want the California legislature to change the law for the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to require a two thirds majority vote to allow any farmland to be annexed to a city. If adopted, the law would have an impact on Watsonville's expansion efforts.

Watsonville City Manager Carlos Palacios said, "Cities across the state would oppose that... (LAFCO has) plenty of power." He said the Watsonville City Council would take the issue to the League of Cal-

ifornia Cities, one of the most powerful lobbying groups in the state. He said the council is actually going the other way on the issue. "They're looking for reform" regarding LAFCO, he said. "We want the role of LAFCO to be clearer."

The law setting up the commissions in each county was established during the 1960s when large cities like San Jose started establishing territory for themselves by annexing strips along major highways so they could reserve territory for expansion, while at the same time keep neighboring cities from aggressive annexation programs.

Supervisor Ray Belgard opposed the program put together by the administrative office staff. He said the proposal goes too far.

See ANNEXATIONS, page 6

ANNEXATIONS

From Page 1

Supervisor Walt Symons, supported the program. "I'm totally opposed to the annexation of agricultural land," he said. Symons said if Watsonville wanted to annex land, "let them go up (taller buildings) or go east."

Palacios said Watsonville would like LAFCO to be required to consider proper balances between housing and job needs, rather than preserving agricultural land.

The second major proposal would have the legislature require environmentalist representation on the State Board of Forestry. Belgard said he didn't see a need for the state to open up the board of forestry beyond its current make-up.

Big Creek Lumber company owner Bud McCrary says current law allows a wide range of people to sit on the forestry board. "The current board is more than timber owners," he said. "It's pretty much non industrial now... There's farmers and other people on it."

Symons again came down on the other side. "They (environmental groups) have 30 people there (at forestry board meetings) now to speak on everything," he said. "If they had a seat, maybe only one of them would speak." He doubted environmental groups would gain much if they had a seat.

McCrary says the movement against the timber industry by Santa Cruz County will soon come under the category of taking private property, and expects numerous lawsuits to be filed.