

Watsonville's plan for next 13 years unveiled for council

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville's General Plan — the city's blueprint of land-use policies for the next 13 years — was presented to the City Council last night.

Although there was some time for comments and questions, last night's meeting was mostly an overview of the plan, given by consultant Nancy Alexander.

A series of "community meetings" in various neighborhoods and other public hearings on the plan will be held in the fall. Final revisions will then be made, with adoption expected in February.

The General Plan projects a 1.8-percent growth rate in the area's population, from 38,672 to 50,538 by 2005. It predicts 5,300 new housing units will be needed in the Watsonville-Freedom area by that year.

The plan proposes that 2,100 housing units be added within the city limits, that 1,800 should be built on land south of Corralitos Creek along East Lake Avenue and that 1,000 more should be constructed in the Buena Vista-Calabasas area. Other, smaller parcels just outside the city limits would absorb the rest. The area outside the city would first have to be annexed by the city. The city would not be involved in building the new units, but would just set policy to allow or encourage the development.

Alexander said the plan tries to strike a balance between the community's competing needs and desires, including affordable housing, commercial and industrial development, and the preservation of agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas. It tries to plan for all of those concerns within the political and geographical constraints of the area.

Alexander called the plan "very, very environmentally responsible," but, she said, "you cannot have it all." Some farm land, for example, has been designated for residential development.

The plan was praised by Planning Commissioner Maria Corralejo, who said it is "very family- and community-oriented and is very impressive."

But Councilman Lowell Hurst said he thought the plan contradicted itself. While it names the preservation of agricultural land as a goal, Hurst said, "some of the best ag land" — the area south of Corralitos Creek — would be converted to residential land under the plan.

"That's the equivalent of filling in the sloughs to save them," he said.

Jeff Brothers, president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, also said he'd prefer to see more development in the Calabasas-Buena Vista area. Although the Farm Bureau hasn't taken a for-

mal position on the General Plan, Brothers said he was personally "a bit uneasy with prime ground being converted" to residential use.

City Manager Steve Salomon asked whether more homes could be placed in the Buena Vista-Calabasas area, where the plan proposes to put about 1,000 new homes, so that less of the south Corralitos Creek area would be needed.

But Alexander and Mike Waller, the traffic consultant who worked on the plan, said that putting more homes in the Buena Vista-Calabasas area would present severe traffic problems. Those problems would be hard to solve because the hilly terrain leaves few options for additional roads.

Nonetheless, Councilman Todd McFarren said he'd like to see those options explored. McFarren also questioned the plan's proposal that some parcels on the west side that are currently being farmed be acquired for industrial and commercial development.

"How many jobs are lost by the annexation of agricultural land?" he asked.

Alexander said that, using countywide figures of the number of acres farmed and the number of agricultural workers, she figures there is four-tenths of a job per acre.

That didn't make sense to McFarren, who said he thinks it's much higher. McFarren told Alexander that she ought to call area farmers and find out how many people they employ instead of trying to extrapolate from county figures.

McFarren also objected to the designation of a parcel next to East Struve Slough as residential.

There have been ongoing efforts to get money to purchase that land, which is environmentally sensitive, to keep it as open space, he said. That ought to be reflected in the plan, at least with a question mark, rather than assume it will be residential, he said.

General plans are required by law. They map out how local jurisdictions will grow and set land-use policies. All other development requirements and policies must be matched to the General Plan, and any new development that comes before the council must be consistent with General Plan goals.

The city began updating its plan in 1986 with a series of "town hall" meetings and a survey of local residents. Work on the General Plan, interrupted by the 1989 earthquake and the conversion to district elections, began again last summer.

Free copies of the General Plan's executive summary are available at the Planning Department. Copies of the General Plan itself are available to the general public for \$16.50.

REF

WATSONVILLE
REGISTER
August 5