

# Broad accord reached for P.V.'s character

Council backs measure that adds housing,  
aims to protect agriculture, wetlands



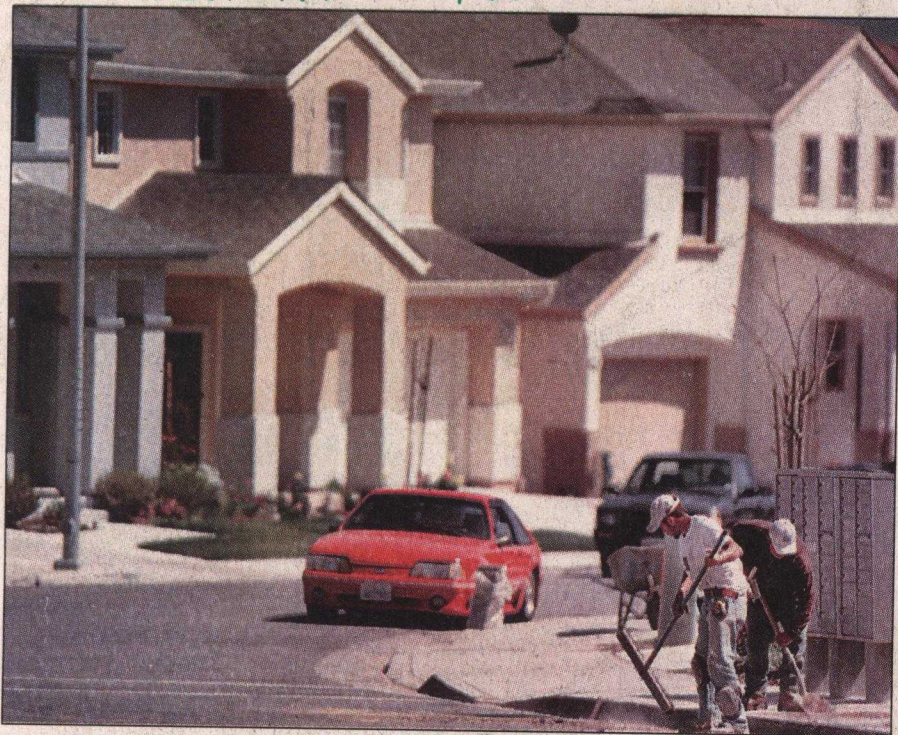
Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Watsonville officials are developing a growth plan in the face of competing agricultural, environmental and housing interests.

## Plan could go before voters in November

Watsonville Growth

4-11-02



Workers tidy up a street in the Sunset Cove development off Harkins Slough Road on Wednesday. Watsonville's proposed growth plan would allow 4,100 more homes in the South County city of 48,000 people.

By **HEATHER BOERNER**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — How Watsonville lives and grows is now in the hands of voters after a "milestone" decision by City Council members.

After four hours of discussion, the council voted 5-2 Tuesday night to endorse the Urban Growth Area Initiative, which would annex 400 acres in the next 25 years while preserving farmland and protecting the slough system. The proposal calls for 4,100 homes and 2,000 new jobs.

Now the city's future is up to voters. Action Pajaro Valley, a coalition of community groups formed to address the area's biggest issues, created the initiative and will begin gathering signatures — 1,200 by June 6 — to place the measure on the November ballot. Lisa Dobbins, executive director of Action Pajaro Valley, called the council's endorsement "a milestone in our city's politics."

Endorsing a growth plan is something unique in Santa Cruz County as well. Cities in Sonoma County and others around the state have approved similar urban growth boundaries, but they are relatively rare.

Some neighbors, however, are planning to oppose the proposal. Pat Fink, whose back fence abuts an area proposed for annexation, said she's organizing her neighbors against the plan because they were not informed, and they want to preserve the open space.

The decision to endorse the initiative was far from easy. Tinged with accusations and racial tension, the council and 40 speakers tackled the city's historic niche as a farming town, its need for affordable housing and what kind of

Please see **GROWTH PLAN** on **BACK PAGE**

**'I don't want to see this city become a place where the only connection  
residents have to it is that it's a bedroom where they sleep.'**

VICE MAYOR RICHARD DE LA PAZ



# Growth plan

Continued from Page A1

city residents want in 2030.

Councilwoman Ana Ventura Phares said the plan is an attempt to help the city make difficult choices.

In the proposal, the city would not grow beyond Highway 1, making it one of the few cities in the county to forfeit prestigious beachfront real estate.

It's a city that has the largest gap in the county between residents' incomes and home prices. It's a city that's been historically agricultural, with low-paid workers and without a shopping mall whose taxes help fund social services.

"Because we won't build over the sloughs, we won't pave over farmland, our people go to the Capitola Mall or Salinas, and we lose all that money," said Ventura Phares. "And if people want farmland, we're going to have to house farmworkers who have to try to work and live in this county."

But Vice Mayor Richard de la Paz and Councilwoman Judy Doering-Nielsen disagreed with the initiative's vision of the future. De la Paz said he'd like the city to be more industrial and less dependent on farm work. Referring to a man who said he drives from Watsonville to San Francisco every day to afford his house, de la Paz said he can't support a plan that only creates a fraction of the jobs future residents will need.

"I don't want to see this city become a place where the only connection residents have to it is that it's a bedroom where they sleep," he said.

Doering-Nielsen said the proposal was created without the input of residents of the Brewington and Buena Vista neighborhoods. She also objected to one provision in the proposal that would make an area near the Brewington neighborhood 50 percent affordable housing.

But for the five council members who supported it, the issue was less that Watsonville is proposing to map out its future than that the rest of the county refuses to do the same.

"The county has failed historically every time it has had the opportunity to support housing," said Councilman Rafael Lopez, who represents the second-poorest district in the city, compared to Doering-Nielsen, who represents one of the richest. "The county has had no leadership on this and instead chosen to approve McMansions at every opportunity. It has been out of compliance with the state and regional housing need since time immemorial."

In a city that used to be majority white and is now 75 percent Latino, the proposal for the future touched on today's tensions.

Watsonville resident Jose Moreno began in Spanish to beseech the council to approve the plan, saying it's common for eight to 10 people to live in one apartment out of

economic necessity. But a man sitting in the front row interrupted Moreno, shouting, "English, please!"

The outburst prompted de la Paz to say, "It's their right to speak to the issue, whether in English or in Spanish. If you don't like it, there's the door."

The audience erupted in applause.

The city's demographic change in the last few decades wasn't the only issue before the council. The future of the city's borders was a primary concern of those who live around the city. Part of the initiative calls for a section of farmland to be converted to housing, with at least half being affordable.

Residents of the Brewington neighborhood worried that 50 percent affordable would reduce their property values. Residents of the Buena Vista neighborhood north of the city said they objected to the proposal not because it's a bad plan but because they think it's being forced on them.

"To be a valley of character, we need to act with integrity," said Gonzalo Rodriguez, who lives in Buena Vista. "We're going to be neighbors if this plan goes through, and we want to be good neighbors. But we need to understand this plan."

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