

✓ Watsonville OKs annex of Freedom neighborhood

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WATSONVILLE — Residents of a Freedom neighborhood were given preliminary approval Tuesday to become part of the city as the City Council voted to back their annexation bid.

The Carnation Drive neighborhood, bordered by Watsonville Community Hospital and the Kmart shopping center, is largely residential, with 93 homes and 26 condominiums. It also includes vacant commercial lots on Green Valley Road between Taco Bell and Corralitos Creek.

Residents are seeking inclusion in city limits because they say it would lower taxes they pay as county residents, and improve fire and police response.

Despite backlash from some residents after Gordon Kobayashi began his campaign in July, resist-

ered voters signing petitions in favor of the annexation outnumbered those opposed, 90 to 55.

Final annexation approval is given by the Local Agency Formation Commission, which should take up the matter in April or May, said LAFCO's Executive Director Pat McCormick. But registered voters living in the neighborhood have the last say.

"If in fact the majority of the residents (who are registered voters) don't want it, they still can vote it down," said Councilman Todd McFarren.

At Tuesday's meeting, annexation opponent Herb Schwartz was the only one to speak against the move. He said the council should have considered the will of most residents in the area who signed petitions opposing annexation, but aren't counted because they aren't registered to vote.