

Deadline on Franich-land vote nears

By GREG BEEBE
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WATSONVILLE — The clock is ticking on the Franich property.

The Local Agency Formation Commission is running out of time to decide a bid by the city of Watsonville to annex 72 acres of prime agricultural land to use for a school, park and hundreds of housing units.

LAFCO has voted repeatedly to postpone deciding on the Franich family land until after the city finishes its general plan, a blueprint for city growth into the year 2005.

But LAFCO commissioners struck a deal with the city earlier this year, agreeing to decide by Dec. 31; the commission's final meeting of the year is scheduled Dec. 8.

Though the city is making progress on the general plan — a draft version was approved

Monday night by the city Planning Commission — it is “highly unlikely” the general plan will be complete before Dec. 8, said Assistant Planning Director Charlie Eadie.

A more realistic date is January or February, he said.

LAFCO executive officer Pat McCormick said Tuesday that he will remind LAFCO commissioners at this morning's meeting the deadline is fast approaching.

“At this point we have a written agreement that says we will give (the city) a decision by the end of the year,” said McCormick. But it's possible, McCormick said, the commission may want to postpone its vote on Franich until the city finishes the general plan.

Watsonville City Manager Steve Salomon said it “seems pretty clear” that the general plan won't be finished by Dec. 8.

“If they ask us (for an extension) I guess we'll

take it back to the council and see what they think,” Salomon said.

Principal property owner Tony Franich said the city is “getting close” to finishing the general plan, but declined to offer his sentiments about granting another extension to LAFCO.

LAFCO commissioner Bob Garcia said he would probably support another continuation if it appears the growth plan won't be completed before the last LAFCO meeting of the year.

The Franich property could be a good place for city expansion, said Garcia, “but I can't make that decision until I see the general plan.”

The Local Agency Formation Commission meets at 9:30 a.m. today in the Board of Supervisors Chamber, fifth floor, County Government Center, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz.