

# First steps taken toward new city plan

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The first steps have been taken in the drafting of a plan for the growth of the city of Watsonville to the year 2005.

The General Plan — the blueprint for how and where the city will allow growth — is being scrutinized by a steering committee made up of members of the City Council and the planning, parks and design review commissions.

The city is currently operating on a General Plan adopted in 1969, with projections up to 1990. Under state law, cities and counties must have general plans projecting 15 to 20 years ahead, so it is time for the city to get working on a revised plan.

At a meeting yesterday, the committee discussed some of the things they will be considering. Such topics as transportation, housing, industrial growth and population growth must all be considered in determining any expansion of the city, whether it would be

through annexation of land or building within the existing city limits.

Basic to the decisions, Planning Director Bud Carney said, is what the quality of life is here, and how the city wants to maintain or change it.

Carney presented the committee with a population projection showing the city would have about 40,000 residents in the year 2005 if growth continues at the pace of the last few years.

"I feel this projection is a very, very conservative projection," Carney said. "The question is, 'Is there an optimum population the city wants?'"

If there is, the city can set policies that will limit its growth.

The city also must decide if it is committed to preserving agricultural lands surrounding the city, Carney said. "If the city wants to expand its boundaries, is it willing to sacrifice agricultural land?" he asked.

Members of the committee said they wanted the city to do what it could to preserve prime agricultural lands. Some members said, however, that they would be interested in finding out which lands surrounding the city are considered marginal farming lands because those properties could be places for future city expansion.

The committee discussed the need for city growth, and the need to determine in which direction the growth would be practical.

All the discussion at yesterday's meeting was in general terms, because the committee is just at the beginning of its review of the General Plan. Over the course of the next year, the committee will address each land-use issue in depth and determine what policies the city should follow.

When finished, the committee's work will be forwarded to the Planning Commission and City Council, each of which will hold public hearings on the new General Plan. The council is the final authority on the adoption of the document.