

# Watsonville battle brews over growth

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**WATSONVILLE** — City leaders entered the final stage of a long-time tug-of-war Monday over where the city will expand in the next 12 years.

During the next four months, city officials must convince a divided public that growth will mean building homes and industry on farm land, wetland areas and in sparsely populated neighborhoods.

In the first of a series of public meetings that eventually will lead to a planning guide for city growth until 2005, more than 70 residents and representatives of various groups showed up to speak to the city Planning Commission.

The city's task was clear: As speakers gave sound reasons not to build on almost every parcel outlined in the general plan draft, others pleaded for the city to build affordable housing for the hundreds of families that need it.

Many speakers rallied behind the Lee Road/Harkins Slough area for development of 1,800 homes. Attorneys for Tai and Associates pointed out that one partnership owns the majority of that land, making it easier to develop. An ecological consultant hired by Tai showed on a map that "sensitive" development of that area could "preserve," and even "enhance" fragile habitats.

Residents of the Calabasas Road area, slated with the Buena Vista neighborhood to hold 1,000 homes, also backed the Lee Road/Harkins Slough area for development instead of their backyard.

"If your (Calabasas) proposal goes through, I'm sure most of the residents of Calabasas Road will fight this," said Calabasas resident Pat Rooney.

He and other residents told commissioners they feared having to pay the high costs of developing their hilly area.

Hernan Martinez, director for CHISPA, a low-income housing development organization, told commissioners he supports development on the Lee Road/Harkins Slough area because Tai & Associates has informally agreed to commit half their housing developments to low-income and affordable housing.

Debbie Malkin, representing the Sierra Club, opposed the Lee Road/Harkins Slough development proposal, saying it threatens frag-

ile habitats and wildlife.

Clay Kempf of Watsonville Westlands Watch gave commissioners an eight-page report opposing development in the area, citing threats to the sloughs and the life they support.

The city general plan calls for Watsonville to build an additional 5,000 housing units by 2005. That figure is based on a 1.8 percent growth rate and is conservative compared to the city's actual growth rate of 2.8 percent.

Other pieces of land being considered as part of the city puzzle is the area south of Corralitos Creek, the Manabe/Bergstrom area, the area between Crestview and Atkinson Lane and the Franich property next to East Lake Village.

Though Watsonville leaders have been trying for seven years to develop its general plan — delayed by the 1989 earthquake and the redrawing of city districts in 1990, they are now scrambling to draw future city boundaries by Dec. 31.

That's when they must finish the general plan if they want the Local Agency Formation Commission to decide whether they can annex the 72 acres of Franich farm land to the city.

If approved, the annexation would mean the city would get about 200 units of low-income housing, a park and a school.

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Oct. 4, but commissioners are expected to hold another public meeting on the city general plan before then.