

Council puts top priority on Freedom

By MIKE WALLACE

Freedom first, said the city council last night.

In a special meeting called to discuss annexation and the city's future growth, five of the six council members present said they felt annexation of the Freedom area ought to be given top priority.

The part of Freedom under discussion included the land west of Freedom Blvd. on both sides of Green Valley Road to Airport Blvd. on the north and the city limits on the south, as well as Carnation Manor, and an area along both sides of Freedom Blvd. up to the vicinity of Buena Vista Drive.

No formal action was taken, but city manager Ronald Bartels said that, based on the council's comments, city staff would go to work on the preparation of detailed financial information on the effect of

Freedom annexation — both for the city and Freedom.

Bartels said that the information would be ready by January, which means that it would be possible to hold an election as early as June.

The sense of the council and staff seemed to be that the Freedom area should be added to the city through the process of district reorganization, rather than annexation.

In order to have an annexation, in the legal sense of the word, petitions would have to be circulated among residents of the Freedom area, through which they would ask to join the city.

District reorganization wouldn't require that. Instead, the board of supervisors would petition LAFCO — the Local Agencies Formation Commission — for a reorganization of the Freedom Fire District

and Freedom Sanitation District, in effect asking that the city take over part of these districts' operations by incorporating those areas into the city.

Watsonville would presumably ask the supervisors to make such a petition, based on annexation studies in the area.

LAFCO would then hold a hearing on the matter, during which petitions from residents opposed to joining the city could be presented.

Based on protests, LAFCO could modify the boundary lines of the area to be reorganized, leaving out districts in which there was strong opposition to joining the city.

After LAFCO approved the boundary lines of the reorganization area, there would be an election in the area, with the residents deciding whether or not they want to

become a part of Watsonville.

Only councilwoman Jean McNeil didn't see the Freedom area as the top priority for annexation. She said the city should first move to take in land to the west of the city, in the Harkins Slough - Lee Road area, where annexation petitions are currently being circulated. Most of the other council members gave this area second priority. Don Sauer was absent, attending a Pajaro Valley school board meeting.

Mayor Bill Johnston said that if the Freedom area were annexed, some agreement would have to be worked out with the Freedom fire district.

His suggestion was that the city should acquire the Freedom fire station, but let the district keep its fire equipment and move to a new station elsewhere.

The city could then sell the fire station and

annexation

build a new one at the airport to provide adequate fire protection on the city's north side, Johnston said.

Other ideas bandied about at last night's discussion included:

—Consideration of annexing Pajaro Dunes to the city. Johnston and councilman Charles Palmtag said that if the area now being considered for annexation on the west side were to join the city, the city limits would be only two miles from Pajaro Dunes. Johnston suggested that a fire station might be built at Beach and San Andreas Roads, to serve the industrial area, Monterey Bay Academy and Pajaro Dunes. As for annexing the Dunes, Johnston said, "To me this is ideal, especially with that \$11 million assessed valuation."

—Annexation of land along East Lake Ave. and some of the residential areas near

the lakes. Johnston predicted that annexation proceedings in this area might "take off" if Tony Franich, who owns an orchard off East Lake near the city limits, decides to petition for annexation to the city.

This drew a comment from councilman Charles Palmtag, who said the city should make clear that, "We're not going to arbitrarily let people develop agricultural land just because it's in the city."

Toward the end of the meeting, councilman Rex Clark said he felt the city should try to establish an interest in areas that might some day become part of the city, and try to direct their growth now, rather than taking them in after they've been developed under the county's jurisdiction.

Johnston agreed with this, and added, "Of course you know how I stand. The whole valley ought to be in the city, in my point of view."