

# Watsonville planners change growth plan

## Housing pulled from wetland area

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**WATSONVILLE** — City planning commissioners Monday drastically altered a draft of the city's growth plan they had approved less than a month ago.

To avoid a possible lawsuit, wetlands property west of Lee Road near Harkins Slough was pulled from the commission's recommended general plan. If the land had been included in the plan and annexed to city limits, it would have provided the city with its largest block of housing, up to 1,400 units.

As a result, commissioners were faced with making up for the lost housing on other parcels, to meet the goal of building 2,800 units outside city limits in the next decade.

Commissioners added at least 1,400 housing units in the unincorporated areas near Calabasas Road, and south of Corralitos Creek, which had been slated for minor development.

An opinion released Monday by City Attorney Luis Hernandez said a state-required environmental impact report did not adequately address how development would affect the wetlands region. Most areas targeted for development already had been studied before the Harkins Slough area was considered in August 1992 for development.

Environmental groups such as the Watsonville Wetlands Watch and Sierra Club had threatened a legal challenge to plans for slough area development, arguing it has not been studied properly by the city.

Including the Calabasas area in the city was strongly contested by residents at public hearings, and stricken from the tentative plan commissioners approved Oct. 6.

Calabasas-area residents said they were angry at the last-minute change, and charged commissioners are randomly juggling pieces of land to fit housing numbers spelled out in the general plan.

"I am absolutely furious," said Calabasas resident Joan Holmquist. "The only reason we got moved into the plan is because they just want to get the (housing) numbers up."

Commissioners quickly added the Calabasas and Corralitos Creek areas when it was pointed out in the middle of the meeting that city planners had misread the city attorney's report.

Commissioner Stan Nielsen said city staff incorrectly recommended the inclusion of the wetlands in the plan, under a revised "Urban Limit Line" designation that holds no political weight, but is counted in the housing mix.

In fact, Hernandez's letter to commissioners said the area west of Lee Road shouldn't be included in the plan until a proper environmental report is completed.

"I don't think we're clear on this," said Planning Commissioner Dania Torres Wong. "What the city attorney is saying in his (letter) is directly opposite of what city staff is saying."

The proposed general plan targets areas favored for development during the next decade, and must be approved by the Local Agency Formation Commission. It aims to provide housing and jobs for the city's future population, estimated to be 50,500 by 2005.

Planning Director Maureen Owens pointed out that if the city approves this plan, the Calabasas and Corralitos Creek areas would be harder to include in future city limits than others because they would only be in the Urban Limit Line. Other areas in the plan in-

cluded in the city's "sphere of influence" are one step away from annexation proceedings by the city.

Other areas slated to be included in the city's future map include the Buena Vista area; the Manabe/Bergstrom parcel in the city's southwest corner; and the Resetar property near Highway 1 and Riverside Drive.

Several other properties, including the Franich parcel, slated to provide housing and jobs, already are included in the general plan.

The commission's recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council for approval of the city's general plan before it is considered by LAFCO. The council may review the commission's recommendations at a special Nov. 30 meeting, according to Owens.