

# Watsonville OKs postponement of Franich vote

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**WATSONVILLE** - The City Council granted a five-month extension Tuesday to the Local Agency Formation Commission to decide whether the city can annex the controversial 42-acre Franich property on East Lake Avenue.

In a 4-2 vote, council members allowed LAFCO commissioners to postpone their decision until Dec. 31, from an original July 29 date. Council members Betty Bobeda and Parr Eves voted against the extension; Lowell Hurst was absent.

Principal property owner Tony Franich said he was confident the extension would be approved by his family.

LAFCO commissioners voted in June against making a final decision on the annexation until they see the city's completed general plan for growth until the year 2005.

The council changed the extension from October to December, the earliest council members said they could present a completed growth plan.

While Councilman Tony Campos suggested they "get it over with" and force LAFCO to make a decision, 82-year-old Franich pleaded with the council to agree to extend LAFCO's decision until a general plan is

complete.

"You've won the battle but you've lost the war," an impassioned Franich said.

Mayor Oscar Rios told the council that if they "play it tough" and deny an extension of a land battle that's already lasted 12 years, they would lose property planned as the future site of an elementary school, a city park, market-rate and affordable housing.

Council members voted make their "best efforts" to complete a final growth plan by December, but were careful not to make promises. If a general plan is not complete then, LAFCO Executive Officer Pat McCormick said LAFCO may consider holding their decision further until they see a complete picture of Watsonville's growth.

Finishing a general plan means completing lengthy environmental reviews and public hearings on lands being considered for future city development, including Lee Road/Harkin Slough, Buena Vista/Calabasas and the Franich property off East Lake Avenue.

The bid to annex the property has pitted agriculture groups wanting to save prime farmland against housing advocates who argue that 200 units of low-income housing is worth the loss