

# Judge orders more hearings on annexation

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WATSONVILLE — City planners suffered a blow from a Superior Court Judge's ruling over the Riverside annexation. Environmentalist groups laud the decision as the city is forced to hold another round of public hearings and reviews.

In a ruling issued Thursday by Santa Cruz Superior Court Judge Samuel Stevens, the city of Watsonville was ordered to withdraw its environmental review and pre-zon-

ing ordinance of the 20 parcels located in four sections around the intersection of Riverside Drive and Highway 1.

"The city is back to square one," said Bill Parkin, an attorney representing the South County Coalition for Intelligent Planning, the same group of environmentalist who lost a suit over the city's plans for the Overlook Shopping Center.

The judge also awarded the environmental coalition attorney's fees and issued an injunction on the

property, which will prevent the city from taking steps toward development.

However the judge did deny the coalition its request to halt progress on the Errington Road/Ohlone Parkway project, which is a city proposal to put in a road from Harkins Slough Road to Beach Road to serve future development in that area.

In an interview today, City Attorney Alan Smith said, "The judge would like the city to have another hearing on the approval of the Riv-

erside annexation."

The order asks the council to consider the issue of the cumulative impact on agricultural lands from both the annexation on Riverside Drive and the possibility of annexation of the Tai property, which is 670 acres west of Lee Road.

Smith said the judge's ruling stalled the annexation but should not make the second attempt any more difficult. However, environmental coalition attorney Keith Sugar said the ruling will place greater

scrutiny on the overall scope of the annexations and provides greater accountability.

"Now that the city has to include the cumulative effect, it will be less appealing to the public," he said of the annexation.

The city has been moving forward with the land grab in an effort create an industrial base which will provide jobs. The Tai property is been sought for housing development.

Plans for the 216 acres of farmland at Riverside Drive, which the city has been working on for two years, had been pre-approved and were awaiting review by regional planners.

The Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission, which is the county's authority for approval of annexations, will hold its review process.