

Council: Annexation to be environmentally sound

Watsonville Annexation

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Riverside plans go to LAFCO

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STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Environmental concerns will be “key components” of plans for industrial development of 216 acres along Riverside Drive, the Watsonville City Council said Tuesday in applying for annexation of the area to the city.

After the council voted last month to seek annexation of the land west of the city limits, Councilman Todd McFarren asked that the city make wetlands restoration and consideration of park lands part

of the development plan after the annexation is approved.

“I don’t think we can get a whole lot more specific” now, McFarren said, because there are no applications for development yet.

Bill Burgstrom, an owner of 25 of the 216 acres, said after the meeting he doesn’t object of the concept of having to do some preservation, adding that he doesn’t know what will be required.

Proponents of the annexation say industrial development is crucial to improve Watsonville’s sagging economy, but foes say building on agricultural land sets a bad precedent.

The application for annexation will go to the Local Agency Forma-

tion Commission, made up of seven elected officials from around the county.

Before it can consider annexation, LAFCO will have to revise Watsonville’s “sphere of influence,” the area where the city envisions future annexations and development.

At McFarren’s suggestion, the council asked LAFCO to adopt the sphere of influence that’s part of the city’s General Plan, adopted in the early ’90s.

The sphere would include the Riverside Drive property, but not the Tai property west of Lee Road, where developers are contemplating a large housing project. An application to develop the Tai proper-

ty would require another application to expand the city’s sphere.

The lone vote against McFarren’s motion came from Dennis Osmer, who last month suggested annexing part of the 216 acres and designating a portion of that for immediate development.

Osmer said he is afraid approving the entire 216 acres would “condemn it to Franich annexation hell,” referring to the late Tony Franich’s effort to annex his East Lane Avenue land to the city, which took 13 years.

Councilman Tony Campos, a real-estate agent, abstained because of conflict of interest.

See ANNEX, page 8

Credit union office hinges on deposits

WATSONVILLE — The Santa Cruz Community Credit Union’s plan for a Watsonville office hinges on its ability to raise enough in new deposits, a credit union official told the Watsonville City Council Tuesday.

The union has a commitment from the federal government for \$1 million grant that will indirectly allow the union to open a Watsonville branch, said Jeff Wells, vice president of commu-

See CREDIT, page 8

ANNEX

From page 1

Councilman Oscar Rios said the Riverside Drive annexation has prompted talk in the community that Watsonville “is going wild” with plans to develop farmland.

It’s not true, Rios said. The Riverside Drive annexation, he said, “is less than 1 percent of the farmland” in the Pajaro

Valley.

The review of the city’s sphere of influence will take at least several months; some reviews have taken substantially longer. LAFCO will amend the sphere of influence before considering the annexation application.

Burgstrom said he expects it will be two years before there’s any substantial development on the Riverside Drive land. It will be a decade or so before it’s built out, he said.