

# ✓ LAFCO, Watsonville reach 'agreement' on Franich plan <sup>Annexation</sup>

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WATSONVILLE — While the Franich apple orchard may not be any closer to becoming a subdivision of Watsonville, the parties battling over control of its fate came closer to agreement in a special meeting Monday at the County Government Center.

In the meeting, the Local Agency Formation Commission hammered out a "memorandum of understanding," which was offered to the city.

The memo, if accepted, will determine how LAFCO will handle the proposed annexation of the 72 acres.

LAFCO hopes to reach an agreement with the city to head off the passing of special legislation on property owner Tony Franich's

behalf that would bypass LAFCO. Franich says the agency is hostile to the project.

A proposed bill, passed in the Senate by a vote of 21 to 7 Monday, would allow annexation of the land without LAFCO approval. The bill will now go into a State Assembly committee, according to State Sen. Henry Mello, who supports it.

If the city and LAFCO reach an agreement, then the bill will most likely be dropped, Mello said.

"LAFCO is bending over backward to make the best offer to the city in an attempt to avoid legislation," said Patrick McCormick, LAFCO executive officer. "It's now up to Watsonville."

LAFCO officials say the bill threatens their control over local land use and could set a statewide precedent.

"LAFCO is mandated to take into

account the preservation of prime agricultural land," said Supervisor and LAFCO vice chairwoman Robley Levy. "It's a bill that overrides LAFCO's role as a decision-maker and these decisions are better made close to home."

LAFCO and the city were stalled in negotiations until last week, when Mello sponsored a two-day series of meetings between the sides.

"I'm really happy LAFCO went ahead and approved the memorandum of understanding," Mello said. "Both sides compromised a great deal."

If the city accepts the memo, the project will go before LAFCO for approval after a process of public hearings and the filing of an environmental impact report.

If the city rejects the memo, it will be back to the political battlefields.