

✓CF Watsonville - growth
Citizens have input
on land-use issues
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Presentations on Watsonville and Santa Cruz County's general plans were made in Spanish and English Saturday afternoon at a meeting in downtown Watsonville.

The meeting was organized by a number of non-profit organizations in an attempt to bring people into the discussion who do not normally attend City Council and Board of Supervisors meetings. Organizers were particularly interested in housing issues and wanted to hear how the county and the city plans coordinated.

About half of the 30 people at the meeting at Adelante on West Lake Avenue were relatively new faces to the local political scene.

The city and county are updating their general plans, which are long-term blueprints for land use and growth.

The city's consultant for the General Plan, Nancy Alexander, made her presentation in English, and a few people gathered in a corner for a simultaneous translation provided by city planner Ana Lopez. County planner Cherry McCormick made her presentation in Spanish, and Lopez provided English translations for the two or three people who needed it.

McCormick and Alexander laid out the basics of the plans, including some of their major goals, such as preserving agriculture, providing affordable housing, improving roads and services, and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. The constraints on growth, including seismic hazards, flood plains, steep terrain, farmland, and protected open space land, were also discussed.

Alexander said the city is concerned with preserving agriculture, which is the city's economic base and provides jobs for many in the Latino community. Some of the things the city can do, she said, include finding ways to encourage the "agriculture support" industries such as coolers to stick around, providing housing for farm workers and those in the support industries, insuring an adequate supply of water and preserving agriculture land.

The city is also looking at including some land around Riverside Drive and Highway 1 in its "sphere of influence" to be used as "job producing" lands. Including an area in a sphere of influence in a general plan is the first step in annexing it.

A few members of the audience challenged the 1.8 percent annual population growth rate the City Council selected to use in working out the general plan. During the '70s, Watsonville grew at a rate of 4.9 percent; it grew at a rate of 2.8 percent in the '80s.

Pedro Castillo, a member of the

League of United Latin American Citizens, said he finds the 1.8 percent rate unrealistic because of the city's ethnic makeup and its high number — 31 percent — of people 17 or under. Castillo said he thinks the city's Latino population is going to increase rapidly.

"If we put it at 1.8 percent, it's really too low," he said.

Alexander said the city looked at three growth scenarios, including a 2.8 percent growth rate, and that providing homes and jobs for the higher number of people "takes up a lot of land." She said she thinks the 1.8 rate strikes a balance between the various goals and constraints and is "very reasonable."

LULAC member Rebecca Garcia said if the actual growth rate is higher than what is planned, there could be a decrease in the Latino population in Watsonville because of increasing competition for land, jobs and housing.

And resident Manuel Diaz worried there would be a loss of the types of jobs typically held by Latinos in Watsonville.

"It has already happened," said Shirley Castillo, president of the local LULAC chapter.

Mike Kostyal, a local activist, said he thought the city was fighting a losing battle to keep agriculture and food-processors in town, and that jobs, especially high-paying jobs, are scarce all around the country. He said he didn't see how Watsonville would be able to buck the trend. He advocated rent control and the conversion of the municipal airport to housing, parks and schools.

Residents Consuela Martinez and Aurora Trujillo said they thought the city would be able to provide more housing if it made building permits easier to obtain for property owners who want to add onto their lots.

Several audience members challenged both the city's and the county's affordable-housing ordinances, which set aside a certain percentage of new homes in a development as "affordable." But the definitions each ordinance has for moderate-, low- and very-low incomes are much higher than the wages earned by working class Watsonville residents.

"The 'affordable' levels aren't based on reality," said Francisco Juarez.

McCormick said the county is considering reworking its ordinance. She didn't give specifics, but said the county was considering lowering the income levels and requiring a higher percentage of units to be affordable.