

# Riverside annexation OK'd by council ... again

By MICHAEL MERRILL

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Following hours of public testimony for and against the proposed Riverside annexation Tuesday night, the Watsonville City Council adopted an ordinance to pre-zone approximately 216 acres of prime farmland to

industrial uses.

The annexation calls for the conversion of the land from agricultural to industrial with the hope that it will attract new business to the area, which is burdened with a seasonal unemployment rate that exceeds 20 percent.

The latest city action came after

opponents successfully challenged earlier approvals in court and Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Sam Stevens ordered the city to redo some of the steps in the annexation — including the pre-zoning.

This was the latest round in a battle that has been raging for years,

one that is not over yet. "When a process takes this long it reflects the seriousness of the decisions which must be made," said Watsonville Planner Charles Eadie. It will be up to the Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission to ultimately approve or disapprove the annexation.

The hearing last night highlighted the confrontation between those seeking to preserve the environment and farmland and those wanting to expand the industrial base and available jobs.

Elfaro Medina, 24, said that after graduating from Cabrillo Col-

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lege, the only job he could find is part-time work at a Watsonville department store.

"Please rezone so I and the other students who graduate from school have a better chance of jobs in this community," Medina said.

Speaking against the annexation was United Farm Workers Secretary-Treasurer Dolores Huerta. Reading from a prepared statement, Huerta said the annexation would throw between 450 and 600 farm workers out of work.

"These people cultivate the land, prepare it for planting and harvest crops in lettuce and in strawberries," Huerta said. "Developing this land into an industrial complex would mean the end of these jobs — forever."

Huerta said that by bringing in high-tech, high-end jobs, farm workers would be squeezed out of both the housing and the job markets. "We are concerned that many of these jobs will require skills that farm workers don't have," she said.

"We are also concerned," she added, "that any labor that these high-tech industrial companies import will squeeze the housing market in Watsonville even further, forcing up rents for the farm workers who continue to live and work here."

Eadie said Huerta's numbers were inaccurate. He said the number of farm workers who would be displaced by annexation is 90 to 100. As far as providing employment, he said that while agriculture provides an average of .48 jobs per acre, industrial land provides an average of 15 jobs per acre.

Also speaking against the annexation was Chris Johnson-Lyons, an environmentalist with the Campaign to Save Pajaro Valley Farmlands and Wetlands said. "There are jobs available in San Jose. Perhaps the city could look into ways of moving people over there," she said.

Other suggestions included developing already vacant industrial