

Watsonville - Annexation Report: Halve city expansion



**LAFCO
Executive
Director Pat
McCormick
says
Riverside
annexation
should be
cut to 94
acres.**

STAFF REPORT

SANTA CRUZ — The Local Agency Formation Commission issued its recommendation Friday that city officials only add approximately half the amount proposed to its sphere of influence as is requested by the city.

Pat McCormick, the executive director of LAFCO, issued his report Friday, proposing Watsonville add 355 acres land to its sphere of influence, not quite half the city's proposed addition of 733 acres. One of the most notable reductions was the Riverside area — city officials propose 219 acres of the agricultural land be added, while McCormick recommends 94 acres.

Watsonville Councilman Oscar Rios said that he was not surprised by LAFCO's recommendation, but he still believes the community needs the full expansion to go through in order for Watsonville to grow, something he says LAFCO needs to consider.

"LAFCO should be looking at the realities of this community," Rios said. "And because LAFCO is going to make a political decision, it won't surprise me if the 'no-growth policy' and attitude prevails."

McCormick's report will go to the commission, which is holding a public hearing on the issue Wednesday at 7 p.m. at Lakeview Middle School on East Lake Avenue, where members of the commu-

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nity interested in Watsonville's "sphere of influence" can voice their concerns. The commission will then come back with a decision in 70 days. If the commission approves the city's proposals, the city can move on with its annexation proceedings.

Rios noted many community members who have feelings about the annexation are primarily the working class, and often do not voice their opinions for the commission to hear or see for themselves. "I would like the LAFCO people, before they make their decisions, to take another walk (through Watsonville)... before they make their final decision," he said. "I would show them how real people are."

The debate will likely center

around the need for more jobs in the area versus the sacrifice of prime agricultural land. Last week, a Santa Cruz County Superior Court judge ruled that the Environmental Impact Report of the annexation proposal was legally adequate.

The city is proposing to add a total of 733 acres to its sphere of influence, the most contested piece being 219 acres of agricultural land southwest of Riverside Drive. It also seeks to add 300 acres on West Buena Drive, 122 acres in wildlife area, 61 acres on East Atkinson Lane, 19 acres on Airport Boulevard and 12 acres on North Calabasas Road.



Rios

McCormick's report only included three of those areas, and the numbers were significantly smaller: Riverside Drive, 94 acres; West Buena Vista, 249 acres; Airport Boulevard, 12 acres.

Councilman Todd McFarren said he was not surprised by McCormick's proposal, and said he hoped the report would be just one phase of a negotiating effort. "I think the report was pretty predictable, that was generally LAFCO's position historically," he said. "It seems to me that what's gonna happen is some sort of negotiated agreement as to how much land will be added."

Rios reiterated the need for expansion stimulate Watsonville's economy. "I just think that all the facts are out there, and the tremendous needs are here in this community," he said. "All the facts are out there on why there's such need for this."