

Franich agrees to new concessions

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Landowner Tony Franich made some additional concessions to the city of Watsonville in his attempt to win support for the annexation of his 72 acres on East Lake Avenue.

The changes to the agreement reflect two of the city's major pre-occupations: housing and parks. In an attempt to address a fear that the homes proposed for the parcel

Housing guarantees and more park land

will be sold for prices far above residents' means, Franich agreed that at least 50 percent of any homes built there would sell for less than 120 percent of the average sales price of homes in Watsonville at the time of development.

He also agreed to sell one ad-

ditional acre of land to the city for a park.

Earlier this month, Franich signed an agreement with the city saying he would donate nine acres of land to the city for affordable housing, in return for being excused from the city's requirement that 25 percent of new housing

projects be "affordable." Some were worried that meant the remainder of the homes would be outrageously priced.

Franich said yesterday that he didn't think such an agreement was necessary. The market, he said, would make sure the homes weren't more than people could

afford. But, he said, since the city wanted that particular clause, he agreed to it.

He also said he didn't really want to give up another acre for parks, but that the city pushed hard for it. The city really does need additional sports fields, he said.

In the earlier agreement, he had said he would donate five acres for a park. He also agreed to sell an additional seven acres, at fair market value, to the city for a park. By an even earlier agreement, he had agreed to donate three acres. Between the donated acres, and the ones it is proposing to buy, the city will be able to put together a 16-acre park on the parcel.

The City Council had been
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poised to approve the annexation at its Jan. 9 meeting, but postponed the matter because of a technicality. At the meeting, Councilman Todd McFarren suggested that a subcommittee of council members meet with Franich to see if more concessions could be won.

The matter is back on the council agenda for Tuesday. If passed, the matter will go on to the Local Agency Formation Commission, which has the final say on the annexation of the former apple orchard.

Under the agreement, Franich and the city say the property should be developed to "maximize residential densities for efficient land use," with a target of between 394 and 577 housing units total.

The city has leverage with Franich because in order to approve the annexation, it must find that there are social, economic or other benefits that override the negative impacts the annexation represents. An environmental impact report on the project identified those negative impacts as a loss of prime agricultural land, inducement of growth and exacerbation of the groundwater overdraft.

In related news, City Attorney Luis Hernandez wrote a memo to the council saying that the city should be able to move ahead with the annexation.

Action on the matter was postponed because there was some question about whether the land had been "pre-zoned," meaning that the city had indicated how it would be zoned after annexation. In response to a question from City Councilman Lowell Hurst, City Attorney Luis Hernandez said the parcel was not pre-zoned. Pat McCormick, the executive director of LAFCO, said annexation applications must include pre-zoning to be considered complete by LAFCO.

In a memo to the council, Hernandez said that although the process by which the city did its pre-zoning wasn't technically correct, LAFCO and the city have treated it as such for many years, and it "cannot now be said to be invalid."