

## Watsonville's 'inferiority complex'

The head of the agency that rules on annexations and government consolidations in Santa Cruz County said yesterday that Watsonville residents and officials need to get over the "inferiority complex" they have in dealing with the north end of the county.

"One of the issues we've constantly had to deal with is Watsonville's inferiority complex, dating back to the 19th Century," Pat McCormick, executive director of the Local Agencies Formation Commission, told the Watsonville Rotary Club.

"There's always been a certain us-against-them attitude," he continued. "My advice to you is to cross it off the list. Forget about it. That's not the way to approach governmental relations."

Because of the long-running dispute over the annexation of the Franich Property on East Lake Avenue to the City of Watsonville, many people in South County think LAFCO is hostile toward Watsonville.

That isn't the case, McCormick said. He noted that over the past quarter-century, 95 percent of Watsonville's annexation proposals have been approved by LAFCO. That compares favorably with the 89 percent approval rate for the rest of the county, he said.

A certain amount of the tension, he said, stems from the fact that one of LAFCO's key goals is to steer development away from prime agricultural land.

"In Watsonville, that's a tough call," McCormick said. "It's been a hot issue for the last 30 years, and it'll be the hottest issue of the next 30 years."

In response to a question from the audience, he said that no one at LAFCO is an absolutist on the issue, but that every proposal that arises is bound to generate a spirited debate over which land should be developed, and to what extent.

He also noted that there is no governmental mechanism in place to require a county and its cities to have general plans that are mutually compatible. Despite that, he

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said Watsonville and the county have plans that are pretty much in agreement; it's those few areas of difference that generate the controversy.

As for that controversy, McCormick said, "Please work on a new approach to intergovernmental problems. There's no reason to suggest Watsonville is being unduly picked on."

In addition to ruling on annexations and boundaries, one of LAFCO's charges is to promote the efficient organization of local government. A key area of focus in that respect is fire protection. The large number of small fire districts in the Pajaro Valley is under strong scrutiny, he said, noting such inefficiencies as the presence of fire stations in Freedom and Watsonville less than a mile apart.

"We're not doing the best we can with our tax dollars," said McCormick.

He pointed to the consolidations of the Aptos and La Selva districts and the Capitola and Central districts, both of which, he said, improved efficiency and saved tax dollars.

In the Watsonville area, he said, "We are leaning on those fire agencies to do something to solve the problem, or LAFCO will initiate a consolidation. They're working on it."