

✓ CF Watsonville - Growth

Council OKs ‘inadequate’ General Plan

By JUDY BRILL
STAFF WRITER

Adherents to the notion that growing pains are reserved for the young might reconsider their position had they witnessed the debate over Watsonville's General Plan last night.

The City Council, taking its first official look at the Planning Commission's recommendation, finally approved on a 5-2 vote a plan that could prove inadequate to provide enough housing for the 125-year-old city's needs into the year 2005, but guarantees future battles over annexation and development.

Strong opposition by residents, fear of additional delays of getting a plan in place, and the lateness of the hour combined to move the council to make its decision.

"If we can get through what I wanted, I'll die happy," said Councilman Todd McFarren, who questioned the substance of some numbers and General Plan technical jargon. "The Urban Limit Line" — the city's eventual boundaries — "is relatively meaningless. It's not like the 1.8 percent is going to magically happen."

The main premise of the General Plan is that the city must find enough growing room for an anti-

12
cipated 1.8 percent population growth rate.

The areas considered in arriving at the final alternative included prime agricultural land, environmentally sensitive land, and land that physically would cost too much to develop with affordable housing.

It was McFarren's slightly revised version of the Planning Commission's recommendation that got the council's approval, despite its inadequacy in meeting the plan's growth projection.

As approved last night, the plan for Watsonville 2005, the blueprint for growth into the next decade, identifies the sphere of influence — those areas currently outside city limits but which will probably be annexed — as including the following sections:

- The Buena Vista area. The General Plan targets this land for development of 500 housing units;

- The Atkinson property south of Corralitos Creek. The plan calls for 250 residential units in this area;

- The Manabe-Bergstrom property on the west side of the city, targeted for industrial or commercial development;

See PLAN / back of section ►

✓ CF Watsonville - Growth

PLAN

► From Page 1 DEC 1 1993

- The Resetar property, at Highway 1 and Riverside Drive, for commercial development.

The Franich property remains in the sphere of influence. Its annexation to the city will be decided by the county Local Agency Formation Commission next week.

Franich has been trying for 13 years to get his land annexed. He has promised the city acres for affordable housing and a park. He urged the council not to delay any longer. "I have gotten gray and toothless and bald" while fighting his battle, he said. He told Calabassas area residents who oppose inclusion of that area in the plan, "Rest easy. I've been in the General Plan since '69, and I'm not annexed yet."

The Planning Commission recommendation had included the land around Calabassas Road. But a parade of residents successfully pleaded that their unspoiled land, much of it prime for agriculture, should remain so.

"We don't want to be involved in this," said resident Jim Holmquist. "Calabassas area residents don't want to be annexed now or later."

The plan approved last night comes up 2,050 short of the housing units needed to accommodate the 1.8 percent growth rate set down in the General Plan.

To realize development of the necessary 5,300 housing units, eventual inclusion of wetlands property west of Lee Road and additional expansion south of Corralitos Creek is pivotal.

That land is coveted by Tai and Associates, a private company that wants to build a mixed-use development of between 1,600 and 1,800 units of affordable housing, upscale single-family homes and a golf course.

Omar James, an attorney representing Tai, urged that the Lee Road property be included in the sphere of influence. He suggested that by not pursuing the housing development there, the city would be faced with different legal challenges.

The development here also had the support of Watsonville's Economic Development Council. "Including the (land) west of Lee Road is the way to go, even if an additional (environmental impact report) is needed," he said.

The slough system on the Lee Road property is a sensitive natural habitat, and environmental groups, including the Watsonville Wetlands Watch, predict that inclusion of this area would mean a legal challenge for the city.

The General Plan's companion EIR addresses only the areas within the sphere of influence. The idea of annexing the Lee Road property came later in plan debates, and has not been thoroughly reviewed. The Wetlands Watch said the EIR was therefore in violation of state environmental law and could be challenged.