

Watsonville

Franich annexation moves forward

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WATSONVILLE — The City Council moved forward Tuesday with the controversial Franich annexation of 72 acres of apple orchard on East Lake Avenue.

At Mayor Betty Murphy's request, the council voted 6-1 to "expedite" the city's current application with the Local Agency Formation Commission and provide any additional environmental documentation that may be needed.

The council also authorized City Manager John Radin to continue negotiations with LAFCO Executive Director Pat McCormick to try to achieve a "memorandum of understanding" within 15 days. The council wants the memo to set a time line by which an

environmental impact report will be completed and the annexation will be heard before LAFCO.

The city and LAFCO are under time pressure from the state Legislature to arrive at a resolution of the dispute in six months. If negotiations break down before August, then the Legislature is poised to pass a special bill that will accomplish the annexation, without any hearings before LAFCO.

In initial meetings between City Manager Radin and LAFCO Executive Director McCormick, the two have agreed on some critical points. They both said a memo of understanding was needed, with input from the council and LAFCO commission. They also agreed the city doesn't have to begin a new application.

In 1982 the council and LAFCO approved the annexation, but it was over-

turned five years later when the appellate court sent the issue back to LAFCO for adoption of "findings" on a partial annexation. The court ruled an oral discussion of annexing less than the full 72 acres wasn't adequate and that written findings were necessary to meet state requirements.

McCormick also agreed that the city is lead agency on the environmental report. Property owner Tony Franich said he wants to get moving on the EIR immediately, and has promised to pay the bill for it. Franich will meet with city planning staff this week to select a consultant for the EIR.

LAFCO will consider McCormick's tentative agreement with Radin at its meeting today.

The annexation has been a continuing sore point between the city and county

for six years. Relations took an unexpected turn for the worse when Franich appealed to Assemblyman Dan Hauser, D-Arcata, to sponsor a special bill that would certify the annexation without having to go through LAFCO hearings.

In a letter Hauser sent Tuesday, the assemblyman outlined some of his concerns. Hauser said in the event LAFCO should approve an annexation of less than the full 72 acres, it should be required to address the city's concerns on housing, traffic, drainage and parks. These are items Franich has agreed to furnish the city if the property ever is annexed.

Hauser's bill, AB 4367, passed the Assembly Tuesday with the necessary 41 votes needed to send it to the Senate. However, it may be reconsidered later in the week.