

Annexation

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Cities unhappy with standards on annexations

By BUD O'BRIEN

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) is in the process of drawing up standards to guide annexations within Santa Cruz County, and cities aren't happy with some of the proposed criteria.

LAFCO is the agency charged by state law with overseeing all annexations of one jurisdiction by another within county boundaries. It is made up of commissioners appointed to represent the cities of the county, the county itself, and the public at large. Such commissions were created by the Legislature in 1963 in an effort to bring order to annexations

and to insulate the annexation process from politics to the extent possible.

The Santa Cruz County LAFCO has decided to redraw its standards for the evaluation of annexation proposals as the result of a judge's ruling in a recent lawsuit. That suit, which was brought against LAFCO and other agencies by an environmental group objecting to the annexation of the Franch property to the city of Watsonville, was won by the agencies. But Superior Court Judge Harry F. Brauer noted in his decision that the standards that LAFCO used for evaluating such annexations were inade-

quate.

So LAFCO drew up a set of interim standards to serve until it could adopt permanent new ones.

The interim standards now being considered for permanent status include some that have drawn opposition from the cities, particularly from Watsonville. The two standards most offensive to the cities have to do with maintaining a balance between jobs and housing, and with defining what prime agricultural land is.

From one perspective, the disagreements are another manifestation of the battle between the strict environmen-

talists of the county and those who would take a less restrictive approach to development.

The cities don't like the proposed standard that would force them to provide for a definite ratio of housing to jobs created by new businesses and industries within their boundaries. Officials of Watsonville, Santa Cruz and Capitola all informed LAFCO by letter that they believe such matters should be considered on a "regional" or "sphere of influence" basis, and not confined to the cities.

The cities said, in effect, that it wouldn't be practical, or even possible, for the cities to provide some exact ratio of

housing to jobs, and that planning for such a balance should take in the entire region.

In determining what is "prime agricultural land" — a matter of vital concern to Watsonville, whose plans include annexations of lands now so designated — Watsonville officials urged the commission to limit its definition of "prime" to the Class I and Class II categories as defined by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service. LAFCO's interim standards use the county's definition of prime land, which is much broader, and thus would impose much tighter restrictions on the city's expansion plans.

The commissioners discussed these and other aspects of the proposed standards, but made no decisions. They decided to continue the subject to their September meeting.

The commission has taken on a new look with Barbara Leichter, the mayor of Scotts Valley, taking her seat for the first time as one of the representatives of the cities on the commission, and Bob Garcia, a Capitola planning commissioner, was named to a public seat on the commission. Garcia, who had been the alternate public member, succeeds Stan Nielsen of Watsonville, who yielded his seat after four years as a LAFCO member.