

Watsonville - Annexation

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LAFC reaffirms annexation decision

The controversial decision to allow the city of Watsonville to annex a 74-acre apple orchard for a future housing development will stand, following a decision by the Local Agency Formation Commission which unanimously reaffirmed the approval Monday.

As part of the same vote, commissioners also denied a request by Watsonville city officials to delete the requirement for a public hearing before the Watsonville City Council gives final consideration to the annexation.

Commissioners attending Monday's special meeting at Capitola City Hall included Chairman Stanley Nielsen, Rod Pulley, Michael Routh, Gary Patton and Robley Levy.

The special meeting was called after the commission received two requests for reconsideration of their vote of approval on Sept. 1. Watsonville City Manager John Radin also requested the deletion of the public hearing requirement.

The requests for reconsideration were made by David Bockman, representing the local chapter of the Sierra Club, and Mary

Hammer, representing the local Resource Defense Fund.

Pat McCormick, commission executive director, explained that by law, the commission must reconsider any matter when requested to do so by a member of the public.

Radin, making his request on behalf of the Watsonville City Council, stated in a letter that a lengthy public hearing had been held last October when the City Council considered the pre-zoning and the environmental impact report done on the apple orchard. It is located just east of the city limits adjacent to the East Lake Shopping Center.

The land is owned by Attorney Anthony Franich.

Radin argued that since such an extensive public hearing already had been held, it would serve no purpose to hold another hearing.

Bockman and Hammer both objected to the annexation when commissioners considered it earlier this month. Both argued that it went against county policy to annex prime agricultural land for a housing development.

But the property owner and J.J. Crosetti of Watsonville successfully convinced the majority of the commission that the land wasn't prime farm land.

Patton and Alternate Commissioner Joe Cucchiara originally voted against the annexation, claiming it marked the end of farm land in the Pajaro Valley. Patton, however, voted Monday for the reaffirmation of the commission's decision.

Patton did try to get the matter postponed until the commission's regular meeting in November, saying he saw no need for a special meeting, according to McCormick. But this delay wasn't supported by the majority.

Bockman also objected to the special meeting, challenging the right of the commission to call a meeting at such short notice, McCormick said.

But, McCormick explained that he had met all the legal requirements of notification and that the commission had a right to hold such a special meeting.