

# Farmland annexation initiative on horizon

Watsonville Councilman Dodge:  
Ballot proposal moving forward

By DONNA JONES

*Watsnville - Annexation*  
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WATSONVILLE — Councilman Daniel Dodge said he plans to submit a ballot proposal by Thursday aimed at lifting some restrictions on city growth.

Dodge is pushing for expansion into farmland near Highway 1 and Riverside Drive in hopes of attracting sales tax-generating retail as the city struggles to revive its economy without the help of redevelopment money.

"I'm going for it," Dodge said. "If anyone else has a better idea, I'm listening."

The first step toward an annexation is to win voter approval of an amendment to Measure U, a 2002 ballot initiative that set Watsonville's boundary lines until 2027.

To further encourage discussion of the underlying economic issues, the nonprofit Action Pajaro Valley, which brought various stakeholders together more than 10 years ago to craft the compromise that became Measure U, will host a panel discussion on "Life after Redevelopment" from 8-10 a.m. Friday at its headquarters, 441 Union St.

SEE GROWTH ON A6

## IF YOU GO

LIFE AFTER REDEVELOPMENT

**WHAT:** Action Pajaro Valley hosts discussion on economic development in the Pajaro Valley

**WHO:** Panelists include Santa Cruz County and Monterey County supervisors and Watsonville officials

**WHEN:** 8-10 a.m. Friday

**WHERE:** Action Pajaro Valley, 441 Union St., Watsonville

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## GROWTH

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Dodge said since the state eliminated redevelopment, a program that put property tax increases generated by development into the hands of city and county agencies to invest in economic growth, the city has few tools to expand economic opportunity. And without new revenue, he said, city services will deteriorate.

He wants the city to annex the 80-acre Sakata-Kett property along West Beach Street on the east side of Highway 1 and the 15-acre GreenFarm LLC property — best known as home to the historic but dilapidated Redman-Hirahara House — on the west side of the freeway.

Both properties are being used for farming, and annexation of farmland for conversion to shopping centers is opposed by the agricultural community and by environmentalists.

But developer and GreenFarm partner Owen Lawlor said the city's desire to explore

alternatives is understandable given its "dire economic situation."

The city's unemployment rates tops 20 percent, and has been as high as 29 percent during the recession.

It's important to protect farmland, Lawlor said, but land close to a freeway interchange is a "scarce resource."

"At the end of the day, it's a decision for the city, for the residents of Watsonville," he said.

To get his proposal on the Nov. 6 ballot, Dodge must collect 1,500 signatures from registered voters by mid-June.

Voter approval doesn't mean the city could or would annex the properties, but it would give officials the authority to move forward with a proposal. The Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation Commission, the body that oversees annexations, gets the final say. The commission blocked Watsonville's attempt to annex the two properties in 1997.

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Councilman Daniel Dodge visits the Sakata-Kett property near Highway 1, which he hopes Watsonville residents will vote to annex.

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