

Development agreement signed on Riverside land

Watsonville - Annexation

RP-9-24-97

By VICTORIA MANLEY

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — The Watsonville City Council voted to approve a Memorandum of Understanding with Riverside Drive Annexation Area property owners Tuesday, hoping to clarify its intentions to make the proposed annexation an industrial area.

The memorandum concerns 219 acres to be annexed into the city's sphere of influence. One of the first steps toward annexations, being included in the city's sphere of influence, is currently before the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), who will be rendering a decision either after or at its next public hearing on Oct. 1. The memorandum is expected to go to LAFCO before the hearing.

Watsonville city planner Charles Eadie said that though the memorandum is not legally binding, it does send a message to LAFCO of the city's intent and its

More council reports — Page 8
Flood preparations — Page 3

agreement with the land owners. "In essence, the city holds all the cards — this is just another way of explaining it in a way that we haven't done," he said. "It's not like a contract, but it is at the level of making a public agreement."

The memorandum outlines the city's intent to "implement the goals and policies of the Watsonville 2005 General Plan" — that is, creating an industrial park with limited commercial space as well as public and private park space. Though it did state that 90 percent of the land would be used for creating industrial jobs and that 10 percent would "be considered for industrial supporting commercial uses," it did not specifically mention an availability for parks — an item of concern for Councilman Todd McFarren.

See COUNCIL, page 8

COUNCIL

From page 1

"I hope my colleagues don't see this as just a political vehicle to get the annexation passed but that it is also an agreement with the landowners," said McFarren, who has been in opposition of the annexation. "I see it as a deal between the city and the landowners."

He said he was concerned with the vagueness of the memorandum, that it did not specifically provide for park land or wetlands. "I'm concerned that (the landowners) are going to sit on that land and speculate on what to do with it," he said. "We have no guarantee that they're going to donate any of that land for parks."

Owen Lawlor is a partner in GreenFarm, Inc., one of the property owners in Riverside Drive area.

He said the memorandum was intended to alleviate any doubt that the space would be for commercial use. "It's critically important that people know that the landowners are 100 percent committed to the General Plan," he said. "The property owners are also committed to the General Plan that says there's going to be park land and wetland."

Councilman Lowell Hurst, who is also on the panel for LAFCO, reiterated the importance of the memorandum to LAFCO as a public agreement of intention. "It seems to me that this is another assurance, if you want to look at it that way... of what the city is intending to do," he said.

"What we're talking about here is having trust in the landowners," said Mayor Al Alcalá. "I believe that we are in a society where we can still trust people. Don't we trust each other?"