

# Watsonville airport's future fuels fight

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WATSONVILLE--GROWTH

By Bob Johnson  
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Santa Cruz County pilots and Watsonville housing activists filled the Veterans Memorial Building on Wednesday night for a fierce fight over the future of the Watsonville Municipal Airport.

Pilots urged the Santa Cruz County supervisors to create a commission controlled by people with aviation expertise to review developments near the airport. But housing activists urged that the airport be closed and its land used for moderately priced housing.

County supervisors and the Watsonville City Council had called the meeting to discuss how to comply with a state law that requires special plans for land near

airports.

Supervisors will decide whether to establish a new body to review land use, authorize an existing local agency to do so or run the risk of declaring Santa Cruz County exempt from the requirement.

"We have people living in garages, living eight to a room, living in chicken coops, said Frank Bardacke of the Watsonville Housing Action Housing Coalition. "By the city of Watsonville's own estimates, we need 2,500 additional low-income housing units."

Bardacke added, "The solution to the housing crisis is the 331 acres at the airport that is owned by the community and should be put to the best use by the community."

Tom Harris, a member of the Watsonville Pilots' Association, said closing the airport would be unwise and illegal.

"There are deed restrictions on the Watsonville Airport that say it must be maintained as an airport," he said.

Harris and other pilots asked the county to establish a commission with a majority of aviation experts to review development proposals near the airport.

Both the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau and the Pajaro Valley Chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens have called for development of the foothills near the airport as an alternative to destroying prime agricultural land east of Watsonville.