

Freedom neighborhood wants to become part of Watsonville

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Watsonville Annexation

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WATSONVILLE — Residents of an unincorporated Freedom neighborhood will ask the City Council tonight to back their bid to join the city.

They say the move would give them better police and fire response and fewer taxes.

The neighborhood, near Watsonville Community Hospital and bordered by Green Valley Road, Corralitos Creek and Marigold Avenue, contains mostly single family homes, condominiums and some offices.

A petition circulated among residents there shows that 64 percent, or 90 of the 140 registered voters, favor inclusion in the city.

If annexation is given final approval by the Local Agency Formation Commission, residents would save approximately \$220 a year in property taxes and city-run utility services, according to a memo by city Planning Director Maureen Owens. Watsonville residents pay fewer special fees and are charged less for public services such as garbage collection and water.

The move would not require additional police patrols, Owens said.

"We have our fire trucks traveling through the county to service the city and it doesn't make good service sense," said Owens. "If people were calling for assistance from the police and watched a

Watsonville police car go by, it's frustrating if they don't get the sheriff for another 10 minutes."

Green Valley Road resident Gordon Kobayashi said sheriff's deputies' response to such crimes as burglaries, vandalism and graffiti has worsened over the past decade. "We had a lot of trouble getting the sheriff's (deputies) when we wanted them to come," he said.

Kobayashi has spent the past several months collecting the needed signatures, and even registered 18 people to vote so their signatures would count. His selling point to residents was improved services.

"It's easier to drive to City Hall than to the county government building (in Santa Cruz)," said Kobayashi.

If the council agrees to sponsor the annexation bid, the city will pay \$2,300 in annexation application fees. If the neighborhood is annexed, the city won't know whether it will receive additional property tax money for additional residents served until it negotiates such a deal with the county.

This is a first step in what LAFCO executive director Pat McCormick hopes is a complete annexation of developed Freedom land, including two peninsulas that jut into city limits like a two-pronged fork. LAFCO approved a recent annexation of commercial property on Freedom Boulevard, but advised city leaders to draw reasonable boundaries and not make an end-run around developed neighborhoods.

"LAFCO had told us they wanted us to look at a greater area, not just commercial (property)," Owens said.

"It would make sense to annex (this area)... but if people living there don't want to be annexed and get benefits, they're not in — it's up to them," Owens said.

If the council approves the residents' annexation request, the city must do the following to annex the property: prepare an environmental impact report, hold public hearings with the Planning Commission, City Council and LAFCO, and then get final approval from LAFCO.

In other action, the council will:

- Hold a public hearing before it votes on an ordinance that would ban smoking in all public places citywide, including bars and restaurants, halls, lobbies and offices.

- Hold a public hearing before it votes on an ordinance that reduces developers fees to encourage construction in the city's west side. These traffic impact fees would be absorbed by the city, and be used to improve and construct roadways near the Struve Slough bridge, the Highway 1 onramp, the Watsonville slough area and roads between Green Valley and Errington roads and Clifford Drive.

The Watsonville City Council will meet today in an afternoon session at 4:00 p.m. and an evening session at 7:30 p.m. at the City Hall Council Chamber, 250 Main St. in Watsonville. For information call 728-6005.