

RP 3/29/95

City takes first steps to annex Pajaro

Town not likely to join Watsonville soon

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — The Watsonville City Council last night directed city staff to take the "initial" step in looking into annexing Pajaro and helping residents there find ways of getting better governmental representation.

The motion was made by Councilman Dennis Osmer and passed by a 4-3 margin, with Mayor Tony Campos, Councilman Al Alcalá, and Councilwoman Betty Bobeda voting against the motion. A motion by Alcalá to table the matter was defeated 4-3.

Osmer's motion was broadly defined and left the annexation issue to be dealt with in the future. Pajaro residents would have to ask the city to initiate the action.

Annexation, however, may not be the most pressing issue on minds of Pajaro residents, said Diane Young, one of the founding members of Together In Pajaro, a community organization that has spearheaded efforts to bring governmental services to Pajaro. She said Pajaro is "still digging out" from the flood.

"Emotions are high," said Young,

who added that she was not representing TIP at the council meeting. "Everyone needs to take a deep breath."

There's also the question of whether the city is putting the cart before the horse in this matter. Besides Young, there were only two people in the audience who addressed the council on the issue of annexation. Young, co-owner of Young's Tires in Pajaro, said support for annexation in Pajaro is running "half for, half against." Luz Hernandez said she visited 69 flooded homes and reported residents in all these homes were for annexation.

The city has not approached Pajaro in an official manner, nor has it discussed annexation with Monterey County government officials. Councilwoman Bobeda said the city should first communicate with Pajaro residents and government officials before any serious steps are taken toward annexation.

"We could be beating a drum for no reason at all," Bobeda said.

There were differing council opinions on the annexation issue,

See PAJARO/back of section

PAJARO

From Page 1

but there seemed to be agreement that Monterey County has historically fallen short of adequately caring for Pajaro. The flood was just one more example to prove that point.

Hours after flood waters washed over Pajaro, Watsonville provided emergency help and coordinated a variety of social services. It took Monterey County days, in some cases, to respond to immediate needs in Pajaro.

No representatives from Monterey County were present at the council meeting. Alcalá said they should be asked to attend a City Council meeting and "let them defend themselves before the public."

The road to annexation would be rough, at best. State law bans annexation across county lines. It would take an act of the state Legislature to allow annexation. Bringing Pajaro under the city's wing would mean Pajaro could get better services, but it is not clear what, if anything, the city stands to gain. There is a small tax base in Pajaro and annexation may actually cost Watsonville, a city whose economy is still on shaky ground.

"We have 22 percent unemployment in the city of Watsonville," said Campos. "I don't know if you want to be part of that."

Annexation, according to Councilman Todd McFarren, is actually a "red herring."

McFarren said the real issue is Pajaro's lack of political clout. For years, Pajaro has been the "step-child" of Monterey County. What the city should do is help Pajaro residents achieve better representation, McFarren said.

On a more concrete level, the city should also look into drafting a "memorandum of understanding" with Monterey County that would cover issues surrounding the city providing services to Pajaro, McFarren said.

Annexation and memorandums of understanding may not become a reality in the near future, but doesn't mean Watsonville will turn its back on Pajaro, stressed Campos.

"Watsonville is always going to be here to help," said Campos, who called Pajaro a "sister city." When Pajaro needs help, Campos said, it can expect to see the "same friendly faces" there ready to help.