

Judge OK's Riverside EIR

Watsonville - Annexation

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WPR

SANTA CRUZ — A Superior Court judge ruled this morning that Watsonville's environmental review of the rezoning of the 216-acre Riverside land annexation is legally adequate.

Assistant Planning Director Charles D. Eadie said that the environmental review, which was contested in December, was ruled in compliance with the law by Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Samuel Stevens. "The legal hurdle has ended at the Superior Court," Eadie said.

The city has spent more than a year getting over environmental hurdles with the annexation plan. In July, the court expressed concern over the cumulative impact of converting the 216 acres of the Riverside Drive farmland area and the Tai project, a plan for hundreds of acres of residential development near Lee Road west of Highway 1.

Annexation plans for the Tai property were set aside by the Watsonville City Council earlier this year.

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Keith Sugar, an attorney for the South County Coalition for Intelligent Planning which sued the city, said he did not agree with the judge's ruling and that supporters of the annexation have not thought out the project thoroughly enough. "Watsonville is cutting its nose to spite its face as it moves forward with this annexation," he said.

City Attorney Alan Smith said this morning's ruling gives the city the green light to take their plans for annexation to another level.

The next step, he said, is a public hearing with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which will review the city's request to enlarge its sphere of influence and include the Riverside annexation property within the sphere. Spheres of influence are boundaries outside city limits that mark property for possible future development. The hearing, open to all, is scheduled for Sept. 3.

Once LAFCO has the plan to review, they will continue to collect input before making a decision in early October, Smith said.