

Farmland fight may *Watsonville - Annexation* go to court

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■ **Watsonville:** The city and a county agency don't agree on annexation plan.

BY TERRI MORGAN
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A battle over whether Watsonville officials or a regional agency has the power to make land-use decisions affecting the city's expansion is probably headed to the courts, after the agency rejected an annexation appeal Wednesday.

Watsonville's city council is expected to approve filing litigation when it meets in closed session next week, in an effort to overturn restrictions imposed by the agency known as the Local Agency Formation Commission.

"It's a shame," said Watsonville Mayor Dennis Osmer, who unsuccessfully sought a 30-day delay to give the city time to try to reach a compromise with the agency. "I just wanted to give it one last shot to keep it out of court."

Watsonville's plans to develop the so-called Riverside Drive property into an industrial park will be put on hold until the issue

is resolved to prevent jeopardizing future expansions, Osmer said.

In October the agency, a county organization that governs boundary changes, imposed three conditions on Watsonville before granting the city jurisdiction over only 94 of the 216 acres of farmland near Riverside Drive and Highway 1 that they had sought. In an effort to have those restrictions overturned, Watsonville filed a request for reconsideration, which was denied Wednesday.

A majority of commissioners, noting they conducted an exhaustive review before making their original decision, said they denied the city's request for a 30-day delay because they were not convinced any new information would be uncovered.

City leaders say the most onerous of the agency's conditions is one that would require them to enter into agreements with the

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Zoning squabble might go to court

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California Coastal Commission and the county before seeking jurisdiction over additional land on the ocean side of Highway 1. They want the agency to eliminate the regulation.

"It's not clear," Osmer said. "There are a number of different ways to read it."

Watsonville is willing to accept the other conditions, which include implementing relevant recommendations made by the Pajaro Valley Futures Project after it completes a study of the city's in-fill potential, Osmer said. The agency is also requiring the city to consider rezoning all relevant portions of a 140-acre parcel within its boundaries for industrial use if an analysis concludes

development potential exists.

Environmentalists and farmland preservationists were pleased by the agency's latest decision.

"My clients are very, very happy about it," said Bill Parkin, an attorney representing the Campaign to Save Pajaro Valley. "The bottom line is that those conditions are not unrealistic."