

# ✓ Council Annexation tackles Franich proposal

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WATSONVILLE — Tony Franich soon may argue his case for the development of his prime agricultural land before a county commission that has final say in the matter.

"I think it's a done deal as far as the council's concerned," said Celia Organista, a Watsonville resident and housing advocate. "But it's far from over."

City Council members are expected to approve an environmental impact report on the Franich property annexation at Tuesday's meeting.

Franich has had an application with the Local Agency Formation Commission for 10 years requesting that his property annexed to Watsonville.

Should that approval be given, the issue comes before LAFCO, an agency charged with protecting prime agricultural land except in cases of overriding public interest.

That overriding interest in Watsonville is affordable housing, and council members heard two hours of testimony from the public at their meeting Feb. 9 regarding the need for such housing.

Organista and other housing advocates say prime agricultural land should be developed only if the project includes a large percentage of low-income housing.

A committee made up of councilmen Todd McFarren, Tony Campos and Al Alcalá met with Franich to hammer out a deal that would provide affordable housing and other city needs.

Of the 72 acres of agricultural land, a new Pajaro Valley Unified School District will take 10 acres to build a new school. Another eight acres would be purchased by the city for parks, and Franich has offered to donate five acres on top of the three he's required to set aside for recreation, Alcalá said.

The property, which includes a 45-acre apple orchard, is east of the city between East Lake Avenue and Bridge Street.

The council committee negotiated with Franich to have nine acres donated to the city for low-income housing, leaving 24 acres for market-rate housing, Alcalá said.

Organista said that while the nine acres is better than nothing, there is no guarantee that donation would provide the same amount of affordable housing required by the city's inclusionary ordinance. The ordinance requires developers to set aside a quarter of a development for low-income renters and buyers.