



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Developments like Meadow View apartments help, but the city is still pushing its limits.

Something's got to give as city grows

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WATSONVILLE — Time was you could drive into this town on a sunny afternoon and cruise down north Main Street, all the while looking at cows grazing idly in an open field.

But time has changed. Houses, condominiums and apartments are springing up from Green Valley Road to Pennsylvania Drive, from Crestview Drive to East Lake Avenue, from Brewington Avenue to Maranatha Drive.

However vibrant the housing boom looks, it will be short-lived unless the city takes action. Something's got to give: the city must expand its boundaries, increase the number of housing units that can be built on any given lot, or move to convert its commercial property to residential zoning.

City planners estimate all residentially zoned parcels will be gone by the early 1990s if the present rate of growth continues.

The growth is heating up debate in Watsonville about the "quality of life," about whether the city should annex new land to accommodate the inexorable influx of more people, about whether "marginal agricultural land" should be converted to housing, and about the need to find suitable shelter for the poor.

In short, what do residents want for this city of the Pajaro Valley?

The city Planning Department estimates that by January 1991,

the population will grow to 30,000, up 4,000 people from the current population of 26,000. Some say the figure is much higher because of undocumented field workers.

In this city of 9,239 households — detached homes, condominiums, apartments and mobile homes — nearly 300 new building permits a year will be needed to house the expanding population.

It's not only an expanding population, but an overcrowded one. City surveys continue to show a large number of residents living in cramped quarters. Some 17 percent of the people live in overcrowded housing in Watsonville compared with a county rate of 6 percent.

City Building Official Neil England said the city "gets complaints daily on overcrowding." In some cases the complaints come from neighbors; in other cases, such as when the rents are raised, it's tenants who complain.

With the Fire Department, England conducts inspections on substandard housing. "Once we see something (wrong) we're committed to carrying through on it," he said. "If it's not an immediate life-threatening situation, we can give the residents time to relocate."

One of the biggest problems in the city is the garages that have been turned into dwellings, said England. "Older structures do have problems," said England, "but garage conversions are worse. They can be very dangerous."



Martha and Kathleen Brugler renovated a cottage.

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Private developers, homeowners and non-profit agency bureaucrats give the city good reports for its handling of the housing situation. Whether it's new development, low-cost housing or rehabilitating older homes, the consensus is that "Watsonville is doing something" about the housing crunch. The City Council has approved about a dozen large

housing developments in the past few years. And more are pending.

As Mary James, executive director of the Housing Authority put it, "All planning is fraught with glitches. Watsonville is a smaller entity than Santa Cruz County. I can call (City Manager) John Radin, get the staff together

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Something's got to give

Continued from Page A1 and work out the problems. We get things done."

The council also has instituted an aggressive housing rehabilitation program through federal subsidies for moderate-income residents. About 250 homes and apartments have been brought up to code by that program.

And in a joint venture with C/D/M Corp., the city is about to build 37 units of affordable housing on property it owns at Main and Rodriguez streets, and is leasing to C/D/M for 30 years.

A partial list of recently built housing:

• Apple Hill, Green Valley Road: 152 two- and three-bedroom condominiums, swimming pool, recreational facilities.

• Meadow View, Green Valley Road: 192 one- and two-bedroom apartment units, with 20 percent set aside for affordable housing.

• Maranatha Meadows, off Green Valley Road on Maranatha Avenue: 24 single-family homes.

• Pine Ridge, Pennsylvania Drive: 80 apartment units.

• Oak Ridge, next to Maranatha Meadows: 22 single-family homes.

• Winchester Acres, behind the Starlite Drive-in: 16 owner-occupied townhouses completed, 30 more to go.

• Riverside Drive: 12 apartment units.

• Beck Street: 12 townhouses.

• Madonna Vista, Clifford Avenue and Main Street: 201 apartments.

• Trinity Meadows, Clifford Avenue and Main Street: 22 single-family dwellings.

• Martinelli Manor, Brewington Avenue: 32 single-family dwellings.

• Crestview Drive: 30 condominium units approved, 27 townhouses pending council approval.

• Green Valley Highlands, at Hope Drive and Green Valley Road: 175 units.

There are many more applications on file for rezonings that would add hundreds of new housing units, Planning Director Bud Carney said.

In a city that measures only 5.9 square miles — much of which is set aside as undevelopable be-

cause of the sloughs — that's a lot of development taking place at one time. And that doesn't take into consideration all of the commercial development.

City Planning Director Carney said recently that the growth patterns during the past 2½ decades show a major jump in the population in the 1970s which is continuing into the '80s.

"The net result is if we continue at the same rate of growth and if we increase zoning by 30 percent in the RM-2 (residential medium density) to RM-3 (residential high density) range, we'll still only be able to provide residential units to 1991 or 1994," said Carney. "Then the city would run out of available space."

As Carney sees it, "Then it's a

matter of whether the city will want to increase density, expand the city boundaries or look at the possibility of converting industrial or commercial space to residential, which would not be desirable because we need it to develop a good economic base."

Murray Crawford of the Chamber of Commerce believes the new construction is good, but adds, "The general feeling is we're way short on low-income housing."

Like many other people, Crawford doesn't want to see the Pajaro Valley turned into another Silicon Valley.

"The fact is, we've got some room to grow and we are growing," said Crawford. "I think that can be looked upon favorably."