

Next annexation a bit more complicated

The next annexation of Freedom will be bigger, and more complicated, than the four that have come in the last year.

Several property owners are talking about an annexation that would take in all the urban, unincorporated area of Freedom, up to Coffee

Lane on the north.

Three of the first four annexations involve lands that abut the city on two or more sides. One of them, the Clifford Avenue-Arthur Road, can't be reached without going through the city.

The new annexation "has a lot

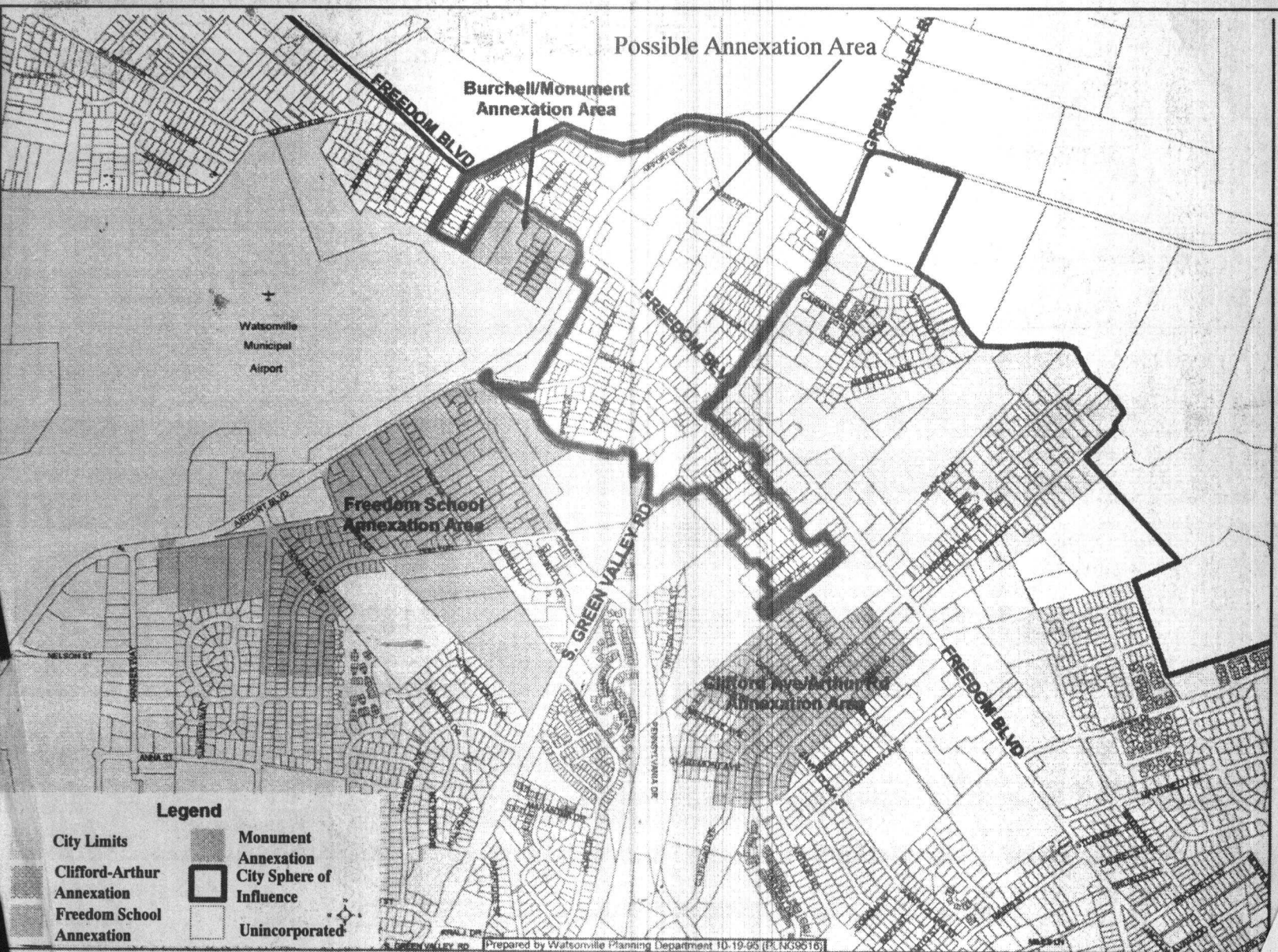
of different uses," including residential, industrial and commercial," said Steve Salomon, Watsonville city manager.

The city has not had to add staff to accommodate the other annexations, but would probably have to with the new annexation, Salomon

said.

Before the city agrees to annex, Salomon said, the city will have to look at the costs of providing service and additional tax revenue, and make sure it would not cost the city

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in the long run.

This does not mean the city isn't interested in annexing. The city has worked with people interested in annexations, but has not solicited proposals, Salomon said.

Louis Schiavon, one of the property owners working on the new annexation, said he and several others at first thought about seeking to annex their own lands, then decided to expand the area when they learned others in the area are interested.

Mayor Betty Bobeda, recalling past opposition to annexation, said she was surprised at the lack of opposition to the last four annexations. The difference, she said, is that the people came to the city, not the other way around.

City Councilman Dennis Osmer believes the city is encouraging the annexations. "There's a drive (from the city) to make it sound that being in the city is better than it actually is.

"There's an obvious tax advantage," Osmer said, "but it's a stretch to say there's better police protection and better streets."

Salomon, however, said law enforcement is a key advantage — police can provide more coverage than the Sheriff's office.

Osmer has voted for the four annexations before the city in the last year, but says the city needs to take

a long-term view of future annexations.

"We can't take care of what we have," said Osmer, adding that the city needs to consider crime and substandard-street problems in future annexation areas.

There are such problems in parts of the area now being talked about for annexation, Osmer said.

While boundaries have been talked about, they are not set. Ed Mondragon, of the city finance staff, said the city recommended that property owners hold off until the Clifford Avenue-Arthur Road annexation proposal is farther along, and they agreed.

The Clifford-Arthur annexation is in the early stages of the bureaucracy. If it was to be rejected, it would be an island of unincorporated area, something generally frowned upon by local governments.

The annexation process requires eight public hearings, before the city and the Local Agency Formation Commission, which oversees annexations in the county.

It's a tedious process, but not a difficult one if residents and the local governments involved are in agreement.

Residents can start an annexation drive by getting 5 percent of the voters or 5 percent of the property owners to sign petitions. A city can choose to be the applicant, and Watsonville has done that in the last year — in every case after residents came to them with petitions.

— Lane Wallace