

Another battle brews over annexation effort

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SANTA CRUZ — Watsonville city officials and the Local Agency Formation Commission may be heading for a battle over how much information will suffice for the environmental impact report on the 72-acre Franich annexation.

LAFCO Executive Director Pat McCormick presented to LAFCO commissioners Wednesday a list of 15 different options he thought the report should explore in depth.

To Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy, who sits on the commission, the list was excessive.

"The object is to do the reasonable number of alternatives," Murphy said. "That's what the city and LAFCO director don't see eye to eye on."

County Supervisor Gary Patton, also a LAFCO commissioner, said he thought the city's "safest course" was to look at the entire list. "But what the city's going to do, the city's going to do."

He added that anything less than a full review of options might place the entire EIR in jeopardy.

"We legally have a right to ask for a supplemental EIR," said Patton, in explaining that if the commission felt the document failed to address all of its concerns, then a subsequent environmental report could be demanded.

A new EIR is being prepared to accompany the city's annexation request of the aging apple orchard on East Lake Avenue. The first annexation, approved by LAFCO and the city in 1982, was overturned on appeal after the Resource Defense Fund filed suit.

The city is hoping to convert the property into badly needed housing. Also, it hopes to install a drainage system that would solve chronic flooding on a nearby property, build a three-acre park to add to Joyce-McKenzie Park, and extend Bridge Street.

Murphy pressed McCormick on whether a less extensive EIR would meet the commission's needs. "Are

Some mayors seeking a plan to limit LAFCO

SANTA CRUZ — The mayors of Scotts Valley, Watsonville and Capitola are working on a plan to curb the powers of the Local Agency Formation Commission.

"We want to look into LAFCO policies locally and maybe on the state level," said Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy.

At a recent meeting of the Mayors' Select Committee, Scotts Valley Mayor Glennon Culwell, Capitola Mayor Jerry Clarke and Murphy discussed their complaints about certain LAFCO policies and decided to draw up a list of grievances they will formally present to the commission at a later date.

Watsonville's woes with LAFCO are legion, most recently centering on the ongoing battle over the city's attempt to annex the 72-acre Franich apple orchard on East Lake Avenue.

But Murphy said she had other concerns, too. "I have a problem with the LAFCO policy requiring one housing unit for every job. Does that mean for every two-income family you need two housing units?" she wondered.

"Scotts Valley has a situation where part of the city is outside the sphere of influence of Scotts Valley (the ultimate planning boundary of an agency or government)," said Murphy. "I

think that's nuts."

LAFCO Executive Director Pat McCormick said he "knew it was coming. But I haven't seen the concerns of the mayors and I haven't talked with any of the mayors since it became public."

McCormick described LAFCO's decision on the Scotts Valley property — approximately 100 acres on the southern edge of the city — as a "philosophical statement" by the commission. "At the time they did the sphere in 1985, there was a water moratorium, and some concern about the city's ability to provide water," said McCormick. "It doesn't affect the city's ability to develop it."

But Scotts Valley Mayor Culwell said he thinks the issue is an example of another attempt by LAFCO to control growth.

"If it was insignificant to exclude the property from the sphere of influence, why did they (LAFCO) do it?" he asked.

"I feel like LAFCO was designed to mediate disputes and to prevent excesses in the area of annexations. But they're playing with the internal affairs of the city and trying to impose their own agenda on us," he said.

"I'm hoping there will be some kind of reorganization, or a change in attitude," said Culwell.

After the meeting, property owner Tony Franich said the EIR will cost him \$68,297, compared with the original EIR, which cost \$12,000.

"The issue is what is a reasonable number of alternatives. Thinking is it could be prohibitive that old Franich give up. But I'll be a son of a bitch if I'll give up," he said.

McCormick's list of alternatives includes nine scenarios including all or part of the orchard, as well as five

tions. The off-site options include exploring the Buena Vista/Calabasas Road area, which the General Plan steering committee has already dropped; two different areas west of Highway 1 — including one that developers Chuck Allen and Scott Johnson want to develop into Heritage Ranch — and property within the Landmark Business Park site.

Supervisor Robley Levy said there is a "real need to consider off-site alternatives" because of the annexation's significant effect on

agriculture. She alluded to a letter from the state Department of Conservation, which urged the EIR to seriously consider the impact of converting valuable farm land into housing.

Murphy said she thought that all of the information the commission is seeking would be included in the EIR, but it may not be listed as separate alternatives.