

Watsonville - Annexation

Freedom Annex Move Is Killed

By MARK BERGSTROM

Sentinel Staff Writer

WATSONVILLE - The city of Watsonville's desire to annex Freedom appears dead.

Unlike the vocal throngs of Freedom fighters at previous public hearings, some 100 residents sat quietly Tuesday night during another presentation of Watsonville's plan to annex the area to the city.

There was nothing left to be said.

Prior to the City Council's public hearing at E.A. Hall Junior High School, Freedom resident Nicki Pecchenino handed councilmembers letters of protest by 1,070 of the approximately 1,300 registered voters in the proposed annexation area, more than the majority needed by law to stop the city's planned election on the issue.

When he opened the hearing, Mayor Bill Johnston told the residents that the city would present their petitions today to County Clerk Dick Neal to be validated by the county elections office.

"The information I have is that there are enough signatures to stop this election. However, we (the council) will set the election tonight for March 6. If the signatures are upheld, and I have no reason to believe they won't, then at our Jan. 9 meeting we will stop this election," Johnston explained. "It seems

redundant to hear oral protest at this point. I think you have expressed your desired through the petitions you have filed," Johnston continued.

Only one resident spoke briefly before the council closed the hearing and voted, as Johnston said it would, to set the election for March 6.

There was brief applause as the meeting ended and the Freedom residents filed out, among them Pecchenino, contends that the signatures gathered had been scrupulously checked against voter registration roles during the campaign.

The city of Watsonville has long sought to annex Freedom and earlier this month received approval to do so from the Local Agency Formation Commission, which has jurisdiction over land reorganization.

The proposed annexation area is comprised of 552 acres along both sides of Freedom Boulevard from Green Valley Road to Budaa Vista Drive. The area includes some 1,000 residents.

The proposal has been vigorously opposed by the Freedom Fire District, which would be dissolved under the plan, and by residents for a variety of reasons, primarily because they do not wish to lose their community identity.