

JCF WATSONVILLE RP 4/6/88

# Worrying about the future



Mayor Betty Murphy speaks as Councilman Vido Deretich listens at last night's town meeting.

Diane Varni

## Residents like their 'small town'

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People talked last night about Watsonville's small-town character, its agricultural lands and its beauty.

Many residents testifying at the "town hall" meeting on updating the city's General Plan voiced concerns that the town they love may be changing beyond recognition, and asked the council to preserve its quality of life. Some of the appeals won applause from the audience of about 60 people.

North Monterey County resident Cecile Mills said Watsonville's rapid growth, despite stated desires to preserve agricultural land, indicates the council has mixed goals. She urged that "we think long and hard before we permit ourselves to be Siliconized."

Dick Bernard said he lived in San Jose before traveling around the country for four years and then moving with

his wife to Watsonville. He saw communities destroyed by greedy development, he said, and urged the council to use caution.

"No matter where you are in this country," he said, "sprawl is sprawl."

Another man said he's a teacher in the Pajaro Valley school district who's being forced to move out-of-state because he wants to start a family and buy a home.

"Free enterprise went out the window when you restricted housing to preserve agriculture," he told the council, predicting that expensive housing would turn the city into a vast bedroom community.

"If you don't implement some kind of control in the cost of housing, Watsonville isn't going to be a small town anymore," he said.

Supervisory candidates Mitchell Azus and Akihiro Hane were among others

speaking for balanced growth and preservation of the area's beauty and character.

The tone of the testimony, at least, seemed to indicate that a growth-control ordinance proposed at the end of the meeting by Councilman Dennis Osmer might be well received.

"We're at a crossroads in Watsonville," Osmer said. "There are tangible signs that indicate what at least one path will hold for us."

The city's current rate of growth will lead to homes with no space between them, tiny back yards and not enough parking "for a golf cart," he said.

"We're losing what we like most about Watsonville and what people came here to find," he said.

The opposite path is still vague, Osmer said, but a growth-control ordinance would provide a start toward creating a direction and a set

of goals behind which the community could unite.

Other people, including Mayor Betty Murphy, said the General Plan is a way to manage growth.

In an effort this morning to clarify his position, Osmer said his main gripe with the General Plan is in the way it's applied. His proposal won't necessarily be at odds with the plan's growth projections; what it will be is a four-page — rather than a three-foot high — document that, unlike the General Plan, will be enforceable.

"It says, 'This is what you will do, no excuses,'" Osmer said.

Councilman Rex Clark pointed out last night that he's the only council member who was involved in writing the current General Plan in 1969, and said he thinks it has worked well.

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He remembers when the city's population was only 8,000 to 9,000 back in 1951, he said, but times have changed and the General Plan has to be able to change as well. He traced the start of the city's growth spurt to construction of the Bay Village and Pajaro Village senior-citizen housing complexes and the resulting influx of retired people.

Watsonville can't stop people from moving to California, he said, but it can make the General Plan "a living document, so that it will provide reasonable opportunities for all people who would like to live here."

Scenarios considered by a General Plan steering committee formed more than a year ago, projecting different populations and the housing locations and densities to accommodate those populations, were summarized by Planning Director Bud Carney.

The plan tentatively selected by the committee projects a population of 62,000 by 2005, he said. It calls for preserving agricultural lands west of Highway 1 and seeking conversion of industrial land to residential; specifically, moving a proposed residential development proposed for land west of the highway to the Landmark Business Park, Carney said.

Urban development under the plan would take place within and adjacent to the city's current boundaries, he said, where city services such as sewers and water would be most easily and cheaply provided.

Celia Organista, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, recommended that "marginal" agricultural land be considered for affordable housing.

Ron Gordon, who said he was a Watsonville city planner when the first General Plan was adopted, wondered why housing in the alternative Carney described was situated out East Lake Avenue, away from commercial development on Green Valley Road.

Carney said development has occurred in four major areas: downtown, Green Valley Road/Main Street, Freedom Boulevard and in the East Lake Avenue area.

Murphy pointed out that decisions on updating the General Plan are still tentative, and that people will have many chances yet to comment. Public hearings on the plan may begin by late summer, she said.