

Vocal resistance to larger airport

Neighbors like it the way it is

By LANE WALLACE
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Watsonville's airport shouldn't expand, residents of the unincorporated part of the Pajaro Valley told county planners last night in a meeting at Freedom School.

"We're not against the airport (being there), but recently things have changed" with talk about possible expansion of the airport, one man in the audience of 75 told planners. "The idea of having a huge airport is an issue."

Last night's meeting was the first in a series of sessions planners are holding to get public opinion on how the new Pajaro Valley General Plan should be written.

The airport was the issue that surfaced most often when the audience split into small groups to discuss the areas in which they live. Most of them said, "No airport expansion." Nobody asked that the airport be closed.

Before the meeting, Dena Culbertson, who lives near the airport, handed out flyers saying "Attention homeowners: Your property may be condemned by the Airport Plan if you live in or near area A (the inner clear zone) or area B (the outer safety zone)."

Last week, more than 100 people who live near the airport gathered at Calabasas School to talk about the proposed master plan for the airport, drawn two months ago by a city-county committee.

That proposal, Culbertson contends, would prohibit people from rebuilding their homes if they are destroyed by fire or other disaster.

"That's condemnation," Culbertson said during a break in the meeting last night. She is afraid people wouldn't be able to sell their property if there is a prohibition against rebuilding.

Culbertson said there is fear that those in the outer safety zone, which includes some of the commercial area along Freedom Boulevard, could be prohibited from

rebuilding anything other than single family homes.

Jeff Loux, the county's assistant planning director, said people who live near the airport "will be able to rebuild" if their homes burn down. "You may not be able to rebuild and add another story," he said.

Loux said an explanatory letter going out to residents before the Airport Advisory Committee meets March 19 should allay some of their fears.

While the airport was the key issue last night, the people brought up dozens of other ones in the group discussions about specific areas.

There was a general feeling that people don't want to be annexed to Watsonville, but residents of Interlaken said they want to remain in Watsonville's sphere of influence. That would leave the option of annexation open.

"Fix East Lake drainage," said Chico Castro, who spoke for the Interlaken residents. There have been recurring problems with flooding on the section of East Lake just east of the city limits.

Some people wanted more parks and some didn't; one woman urged widening of Green Valley Road from two lanes to four. Some in the Manfre Road area wanted sewers and some didn't, and several people called for bicycle-pedestrian paths, especially in the Buena Vista area.

The comments people made last night will be compiled by Brady and Associates, the Berkeley consulting firm hired to work on the plan.

Public meetings focusing on specific areas will be held in April. Those meetings will be held April 15 for the Green Valley area, at Amesti School; April 16 for Freedom, at Freedom School; April 21 for Buena Vista, at Calabasas School; and April 22 for Interlaken, at Salsipuedes School. All meetings begin at 7 p.m.