

Watsonville to study closing down airport

Activists want low-cost housing on site

By Bob Johnson
Special to the Mercury News

Their city manager says it will never fly, but the Watsonville City Council will study a proposal to close down the municipal airport to allow construction of low-cost housing on the land.

City Manager Chuck Comstock strongly recommended rejection of the airport proposal, and although a majority of council members remained skeptical of the idea, they agreed Tuesday to study the issue over the next six months.

Closing the airport was first suggested early this year by the Watsonville Housing Action Committee as the best way to both provide

affordable housing and preserve agricultural land.

The idea has been vehemently opposed by pilots from throughout Santa Cruz County and by many Watsonville residents who view the airport as an economic asset and a source of civic pride.

Comstock presented the council with a hefty package of reports and letters leading to the conclusion that closing the airport would be unwise and probably illegal:

✓ Finance Director Terry Stigall reported that the airport is directly responsible for 200 local jobs, a consideration cited by Councilwoman Betty Murphy in voting against the study.

✓ City Attorney Luis Hernandez reported that the federal government would have legal grounds for blocking closing of the airport.

✓ John Pfeifer, district manager with the Federal Aviation Administration, cautioned the city in a letter that closing the airport would violate numerous agreements.

"The reports speak for themselves," Comstock wrote the council. "The FAA will not permit the sale and disposal of the airport

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Down below The Farm

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