

# Mello presses for housing ordinance

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State Sen. Henry Mello is pressing Watsonville to adopt an affordable-housing ordinance.

Mello has vowed to see pending state legislation into law that would allow the city to annex Tony Franich's 72-acre apple orchard, but said yesterday he would amend the bill to require the city to adopt an affordable-housing ordinance before it could annex the land.

Mello came to Watsonville yesterday to see if he could help end wrangling between the city and the Local Agency Formation Commission, which normally rules on annexations.

LAFCO approved annexation of the Franich property in 1982, but the decision was overturned in court on a technicality and sent back to LAFCO, after a group of environmentalists filed suit. Saying he could not get a fair hearing before the current LAFCO board, Franich hired a lobbyist several months ago and managed to get a state bill authored that would allow the city to annex his property without a LAFCO review.

The issue of the annexation has been mired in controversy ever since. At a public forum Mello held in Watsonville in June, he said he would push Assembly Bill 4367 through the Legislature by the end of the

legislative session Aug. 31, if Watsonville and LAFCO don't reach an agreement on how the annexation application should proceed.

Mello stressed, however, that he would prefer a local resolution of the matter. So with the

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Aug. 31 deadline looming and little apparent progress made on the agreement, Mello decided to intervene.

After emerging from a grueling six-hour meeting behind closed doors in City Manager John Radin's office, Mello said he felt progress was made on the agreement and he was "optimistic" differences could be worked out between Watsonville and county officials.

"I'm an untiring person when I feel something has to happen," Mello said. "If I was not optimistic, I would say to hell with it."

Meeting with Mello were Radin; county Supervisors Robley Levy and Gary Patton, who are also members of LAFCO; City Councilman Rex Clark; Watsonville attorney Franich; Franich's hired Sacramento lobbyist, Fred

agreement, or "memorandum of understanding," has "about 27 parts to it and I think we went over every word."

Agreement was reached on several points, he said, and city and LAFCO staff members will now draft a new document incorporating those changes. Mello said he would return to Watsonville for another closed-door meeting at 1 p.m. Friday to review the document, and would be prepared to work through the weekend if necessary.

Three or four major points have yet to be agreed on, Mello said, but added that they were agreed to "conceptually."

One is the city's request that LAFCO disregard policies and standards adopted after 1982 when reconsidering the Franich annexation; today's rules would preclude even considering the annexation, Mello said.

Another policy would preclude consideration of boundary changes if Watsonville had adequate land within its boundaries for five to seven years of growth, Mello said, but "I think they (LAFCO) will find that land in the city will last them (the city) about three years."

Mello said he felt the city and LAFCO were within "striking distance" of agreement, and hopes the matter can be concluded Friday.

"From my point of view, I hope that will be the final meeting and we'll be able to walk out of here with a handshake," he said.

As far as Mello's plans for AB 4367, he said he would amend the bill Monday to include language requiring that at least 15 percent of all city housing developments with more than 10 units be affordable for low- to medium-income people. As it reads now, the affordable-housing requirement in the bill would apply only to the Franich property.

On the basis of affordable housing, the Watsonville Area Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture and the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau have also announced their conditional support for the Franich annexation.

"I'm a real supporter of having affordable housing," Mello said. "Especially in the city of Watsonville, that has a housing problem."

Taucher; LAFCO Executive Director Pat McCormick; Chuck Comstock, Watsonville's finance director and assistant city manager; state Assemblyman Sam Farr's aide, Fred Keeley; and Mello aides Carol Lacey and Teddi Chann.

Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy was upset she could not attend the meeting but, since she is also a LAFCO member, her presence would have created a quorum for LAFCO and a closed-door meeting would have then been a violation of the Brown Act.

Mello said the proposed