

Commission sets December vote on Franich land

By GREG BEEBE
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WATSONVILLE — The Franich property ball is back in the city's court.

Members of the Local Agency Formation Commission unanimously voted Wednesday to decide the city's long-running efforts to annex 72 acres of prime agricultural land for future use as the site of a school, park and hundreds of units of market-rate and low-income housing.

The commissioners will vote on the annexation bid at 9:30 a.m. Dec. 8 at the Watsonville City Hall Chambers.

LAFCO members previously voted to delay a decision on the Franich family land until after the city finishes its general plan, a blueprint for city growth, housing and employment needs into the year 2005.

And while it appears certain the city won't complete its general plan by the December meeting, LAFCO members will be ready to vote on the Franich annexation then, said LAFCO executive officer Pat McCormick.

LAFCO commissioners made a deal with the city earlier this year, agreeing to decide the controversial annexation by the end of the year; the Dec. 8 meeting will be the commission's last scheduled meeting of 1993.

The city still has the right to ask LAFCO to wait until the general plan is finished, said McCormick.

"If they ask, we will react positively to a request for an extension from them," McCormick said.

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'The ball's in their court we're prepared to make a decision.'

— Pat McCormick,
LAFCO executive officer

"(But) we want to make it real clear that we're not leaning on them. ...

"The ball's in their court and we wanted to make it clear if they wanted a decision, we're prepared to make a decision (Dec. 8)."

City Councilman Parr Eves viewed LAFCO's willingness to decide the Franich annexation as a chance to close the book on the 11-year-old land-use controversy.

"I don't know how the rest of the council feels but I personally feel the sooner the better," Eves said. "Let's get it behind us. ...

"I think that (LAFCO) is anxious to get it behind them, too," Eves said.

Four of LAFCO's five commissioners have previously said they want to see Watsonville's final general plan — and its options for future growth — before voting on the Franich deal.

Although the document won't be completed by Dec. 8, McCormick said the LAFCO members will be able to scrutinize the plan in its latest incarnation before the meeting.