

Local

✓/CP Watsonville - Growth Annexation RP 8/2/90 Second Franich EIR comes to same conclusions as first

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The annexation of the 72-acre Franich property to the city of Watsonville will have "significant and unavoidable" impacts on the area's supply of agricultural land and on the city's growth.

That is the conclusion of the second environmental impact report on the annexation, released yesterday.

"These impacts are considered significant and unavoidable because the conversion of agricultural land is a permanent commitment of resources and the provision of public services, such as a new fire station and well, would remove obstacles to development of neighboring undeveloped property," the report reads.

Steps can be taken to reduce all other significant impacts to less than significant levels, the report says. Those were essentially the same conclusions reached by an initial draft EIR released last fall. A second report was ordered because the first report didn't examine the approximately 1,000-unit housing project proposed for the Landmark property as an alternative to the Franich annexation.

Plans for the Landmark property, on Watsonville's west side, were submitted during the public review period of the first report.

After annexation, the project proposes to zone the 72 acres on East Lake Avenue for housing and build up to 604 housing units there.

The Landmark project was one of six alternatives to the Franich annexation looked at in the report. Three "on-site" alternatives, which include smaller annexations and different zoning options on the property, and three "off-site" alternatives, which look at comparable projects elsewhere, and a "no-project" alternative were considered.

The report found that one of the off-site alternatives, which says that a potential 685 residential units could be built on 40 already-existing vacant parcels within the city limits, is the "environmentally superior alternative," or the one that would achieve the goal of providing housing with the fewest environmental impacts.

Of the on-site alternatives, annexation of only 19 acres of the Franich property would have the least impact, the report said.

The public review period for the EIR has been extended from September until Oct. 10 in order to give the Local Agency Formation Commission, which will make the decision on the annexation, more time to review it and to coordinate the end of the review process with LAFCO meeting dates.

The document is available for public review at the city planning department.

Tony Franich, the owner of the parcel, which is an old apple orchard, has been trying to annex the property to the city for almost a decade. The project has been met with opposition from various environmental and no-growth groups, along with other community organizations concerned with the loss of agricultural land.

The first EIR for the project was completed in 1981 and annexation was approved by LAFCO and the Watsonville City Council. But the annexation was overturned by an appellate court in 1987 on the basis that the EIR was inadequate.

Franich then tried to get special legislation passed that would have allowed the annexation. Although those attempts failed, a memorandum of understanding was hammered out between Franich, the city and LAFCO on the process by which the annexation would be considered.