

County scrutinizes Watsonville project

1-18-85 Growth
'I don't think we need a watchdog,' says the city's mayor

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SANTA CRUZ — The largest industrial development to be proposed for the city of Watsonville has sparked the interest of the county Board of Supervisors.

At their meeting Tuesday, supervisors voted to maintain a close watch on the planned Landmark Industrial Park and to keep the Watsonville City Council apprised of their concerns about the project's size and its effects on traffic.

Not surprisingly, the county's concern has raised some eyebrows in Watsonville.

"I thought it was very interesting," said

Watsonville Mayor Ann Soldo. "I think we're responsible enough to take care of our own problems; I don't think we need a watchdog.

"I've heard a lot of comments on it," added Soldo. "The people here say we like the way the city is. I know the county is not for growth, but we're for a balanced growth of industrial and agricultural interests."

The Heritage Development Corp. of Watsonville is planning to build the park on a 156-acre site near Ramsay Park, between Harkins Slough Road and West Beach Street.

Board Chairman Gary Patton said in a letter to supervisors, "I believe that the proposed Landmark Industrial Park could be the single most significant development ever considered by the city of Watsonville.

"The proposed development would have extremely significant impacts if approved — not only within the city but also on the county's unincorporated area," said Patton.

Although the county has no jurisdiction to control the fate of the project, Patton's letter suggested the county planning director, administrative officer and county

counsel keep the lines of communication open with the City Council "at each stage of its consideration, and recommend to the board actions we should take to ensure that traffic impacts, impacts on our housing supply, long-term impacts on the preservation of agricultural land, and other significant impacts, are either eliminated or minimized in connection with any consideration and approval of the proposed project."

"I agree with Mr. Patton's comments that it is the most significant development in the history of Watsonville," said Coun-

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cilman Rex Clark, himself a developer. "But I think the council and staff are very aware of what the impacts will be."

Watsonville officials say they, too, are concerned about the effects on traffic. And they say the developer will be required to build the sewers, water system, streets and drains before the rest of the park goes in.

The City Council likely also will require the developer to build a \$2-million bridge over Harkins Slough Road, said Clark.

Watsonville and the county have a history of squabbles over growth, water and taxes, leading to lawsuits and generally cool relations.

But neither Soldo nor Clark predicted this issue would lead to a worsening of relations. As Soldo put it, "I think we're now accustomed to the county being a watchdog."

The project is in the phase of a draft

environmental impact report, with a final EIR to be released soon. Council action is expected to follow. Soldo said that because of the park's size, she doesn't expect construction to begin until spring 1986 at the earliest.

According to the draft EIR, 110 acres of the site will be developed and the remaining 46 acres will be left as open space.

"They have some nice plans for the park," said the mayor, adding the developer plans to use the sloughs in the area as small lakes.

It's expected the park will combine a light-industrial section with agricultural uses. "It could be high-tech," said Soldo, "but it could also be bicycle wheels or candy manufacturing. They (the developers) really don't know yet, as nothing has been leased."

Soldo said she'd like a section to be turned over to the frozen-food industry. Watsonville is the nation's leading manufacturer of frozen foods, she noted.

The plans call for a phased development

over many years, with a total buildout potential of 5,150 new jobs.

The new development is part of the industrial growth to hit Watsonville in the 1980s. Unfortunately, not all of the new development has panned out.

In 1983, Seagate Technology of Scotts Valley built a 206,784-square-foot building that was never put to use. Company officials, hit by lagging disk-drive sales, have had the vacant building on the selling block for several months, but no buyer has come forward yet.

When asked if the council has reservations about the Landmark Industrial Park development in light of Seagate's problems, Clark said, "Seagate's in the back of everyone's minds, but it's not a major consideration.

"Our council takes a little different approach ... than the county. We don't get involved in the economics of a project.

"Any responsible developer would look at the market to be sure they can afford what they're putting in," Clark said.