

# Watsonville considers housing near wetlands

By **MARIANNE BIASOTTI**  
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**WATSONVILLE** — Planning commissioners took city planners and lawyers to task Monday on how development of a 350-acre parcel west of Highway 1 might affect sensitive wetlands that run through and around it.

"I think the biggest problem with this property is the sloughs ... the (Local Agency Formation Commission), the Coastal Commission is going to have a problem with that, and every agency in this country is going to have a problem with that," said Planning Commissioner Stan Nielsen.

But the public hearing lacked public comment. A paid announce-

ment in the Watsonville Register-Pajaronian went unnoticed by many who said they would have attended the hearing, called by the city Planning Department to get input on a proposed environmental impact report about the site.

Watsonville Wetlands Watch members said they were dismayed Monday that they weren't alerted to the meeting.

"We feel there should have been more adequate notice provided for the public, and the meeting should not have been held on a holiday (Columbus Day)," said Chris Johnson Lyons, of Watsonville Wetlands Watch.

However, a public comment period to end next Tuesday was extended to Nov. 16, after LAFCO

last week requested an extension.

To date, few responses have been sent to the city, said Associate Planning Director Charlie Eadie, but more are expected as the deadline nears.

By January, a final draft of the report — which supplements the city's General Plan — should be completed, publicly reviewed and voted on by the Planning Commission, Eadie said. If it passes the City Council, it could by spring be voted on by LAFCO commissioners, who have final say about where Watsonville draws its boundaries.

Lawyers for the San Francisco-based property owner and developer Vincent Tai told commissioners Monday that approving the report

means the city will be able to build housing now.

About 1,000 homes and apartments would be built on the 350-acre parcel owned by Tai, with some 100 acres set aside for wetlands.

Gary Deghi, a wetland consultant hired by Tai, told commissioners that a slough system already "highly degraded" by nearby agri-

cultural operations could be improved and restored alongside future development.

Tai attorney Omar James said that including the property in the city's "sphere of influence" only makes the land eligible for annexation. He referred to the Franich property, which was eligible for development more than 20 years before it was annexed.