

Freedom Annex Idea Endorsed

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The Local Agency Formation Commission this morning endorsed the proposed annexation of Freedom to the city of Watsonville.

Watsonville wishes to annex most of the area south of the monument at Buena Vista Drive and Freedom Boulevard, including the Pajaro Valley shopping center and Watsonville Community Hospital.

Ultimate approval rests with the residents of Freedom, who have been promised by Watsonville of an election on the issue early next spring.

Opposition to the proposal by residents has been strong and organized. Highlighted by several residents wearing shirts labeled "Hands Off Freedom" and "Don't Con Us," speaker after speaker derided the proposal at a public hearing last week in Freedom.

LAFC commissioners heard several more residents this morning before ending the continued public hearing and voting on the question.

The unanimous approval was conditioned on the provisions that Watsonville annex addi-

tional areas if this proposal is successful and that a school impact fee be imposed. Commissioner Joe Ghio expressed concern that small pockets of Freedom not included in the annexation would suffer cuts in services if most of the Freedom Fire District is absorbed by the city, and if the county closes the Freedom branch library.

LAFC adopted the condition, even though counsel Jim Ritchey said the commission has no power to enforce it.

Chairman Robley Levy led the move to continue the school impact fees for developers which recently was enacted for unincorporated areas by the county Board of Supervisors.

Marilyn Liddicoat and Pat Liberty objected, saying LAFC would be overstepping its bounds by in effect forcing the impact fee on the city of Watsonville.

"It's totally inappropriate to impose the fees only on the annexed area," said Liberty.

But, they were outvoted on the measure. Liddicoat, angry at the decision, followed up with a motion to delete the condition, but she and Liberty lost again.