

AIRPORTS

SJM 7-5-91

# Airport <sup>IB</sup>

## to stay open

### Land swap rejected in Watsonville

By Bob Johnson

Special to the Mercury News

The Watsonville City Council has rejected the controversial suggestion that the Watsonville Municipal Airport be closed and the land used to build affordable housing.

The suggestion was first made by a group of housing activists two years ago.

The council voted unanimously Wednesday to keep the airport open.

"The airport provides the community an important transportation mode, which is used by a significant number of residents and visitors for business and tourism reasons," reported a committee appointed by the council in the spring to study the issue.

#### Described as vital link

The committee, which favored keeping the airport open, relied heavily on a study by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) to depict the airport as a vital link in the local economy.

More than \$19 million is brought to the local economy annually by the airport, according to that study. That includes more than \$5 million from the 61 jobs at the airport and money spent there, nearly \$4 million spent in town by airport users, and nearly \$10 million more in other spending.

A minority report argued that the site would be better used for housing and argued that \$16.5 million could be generated for a proposed 1,554-unit Airport Gardens project by selling portions of the land for commercial development and school construction.

#### Minority report is critical

"The Watsonville Municipal Airport is primarily a recreational and training facility, with little structural relationship to the overall Watsonville economy," the minority report said.

The report failed to note that two-thirds of the flights at the airport are of less than one hour, and many of the local business people cited in the study as using the airport, said the minority report, had no idea how their names ended up on the list.