

Franich back to lobbying Legislature 3-16

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Watsonville attorney Tony Franich is once more seeking help from Sacramento to get his East Lake Avenue apple orchard annexed to the city without going through local authorities, Franich's lobbyist said this morning.

Franich stands to make millions if his 72-acre orchard is added to the city and developed for up to 600 units of housing.

Frederick J. Taugher, of Public Policy Advocates in Sacramento, said he has approached several legislators to propose amending various bills to get Franich's orchard annexed to Watsonville.

Last year, Taugher managed to talk Assemblyman Dan Hauser, an Arcata Democrat, into authoring a bill that would have benefited no one in the whole state but Franich.

That bill was abruptly abandoned in August in the wake of FBI raids on the offices of several other legislators accused of carrying special-interest legislation unrelated to the Franich matter.

Taugher said last year that Franich paid him \$17,500 for his lobbying efforts. Franich also made \$8,500 in contributions to

legislators seeking re-election last November whom Taugher had identified as "sympathetic to Franich's point of view," Taugher said earlier.

To get his property annexed locally, Franich must go through the Local Agency Formation Commission, which decides where all city and special-district boundaries should fall.

In 1982, Franich received LAFCO approval for annexation, which was later overturned by a state Court of Appeal ruling. A suit against the annexation had been brought by the Resource Defense Council, which successfully argued that LAFCO should have considered a partial annexation of the property before allowing the full annexation.

Franich has repeatedly charged that he cannot get a fair hearing from the current LAFCO, which he says is dominated by Supervisor Gary Patton, a slow-growth advocate.

Patton this morning expressed frustration with Franich's new attempt to circumvent LAFCO by going to Sacramento.

"Mr. Franich has taken the
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position that the rules that apply to everyone else don't apply to him," Patton said.

Taugher said this morning that he and Franich "have not yet made a decision on what we want to do legislatively."

"We have identified a number of different bills that could be amended that would respond to Mr. Franich's concerns," Taugher said.

Taugher refused to say which legislators he was approaching or which bills might be amended.

Patrick McCormick, executive director of LAFCO, said he wished Taugher would at least inform LAFCO of what bills were in the offing.

"He has never supplied us with copies of bills or amendments," McCormick said. "I guess that's how he plays the game."

When LAFCO did find out about last year's bill, it opposed it strenuously.

Under the threat of passage of last year's bill, Watsonville, which would welcome the annexation, and LAFCO began negotiations in an effort to arrive at a "memorandum of understanding" about the annexation. Those negotiations still continue, sporadically.

Watsonville, encouraged by Franich, has tried to negotiate an MOU that would guarantee annexation of the property. LAFCO has sought an agreement that would leave the commission with its usual discretion to reject an annexation.

Mayor Betty Murphy, who also sits on LAFCO, said this morning that Franich's Sacramento maneuvers are "his prerogative, if he wants to go that route."

Last year, City Manager John Radin at one point advised the City Council to sit back and let the Sacramento bill go through.

Then amendments were added to that bill which would have forced Watsonville to build a lot of affordable housing as a condition of the annexation, and the city became disenchanted with the bill, which eventually failed anyway.