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No agreement yet in Landmark talks

By STEVE STROTH
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Developers of the Landmark Industrial Park are growing impatient with the ongoing negotiations between Watsonville and Santa Cruz County officials, who are trying to settle the county's legal challenge to the project.

Watsonville developer Scott Johnson said this morning he is pleased with the effort each side has made, but he'll consider the issue "unsettleable" if it is not resolved after two more meetings.

"If it's not settled within a very short period of time, then there won't be any reason for us to talk anymore," he said.

Johnson said plans for development of the property have to be kept on hold because of the delays of continued unresolved negotiations.

"The delay hurts us more than anybody else," he said.

Meanwhile, there is still hope for a resolution to the dispute.

Representatives from the city, county and the developers have been meeting regularly since county supervisors sued the city July 26.

The supervisors claim certain traffic and housing

impacts were not adequately addressed by the City Council before it approved the project in June. City officials counter they were adequately dealt with during the review process.

Though city and county officials have been tight-lipped about the progress in negotiations, both have said they are hoping for a settlement.

"Obviously we're hoping that there won't be a lawsuit," Mayor Ann Soldo said this morning. "I'm hoping for just one more meeting to settle this."

However, Johnson is not quite as optimistic.

"I don't see it as being quite that close," he said.

"We are close enough to keep talking, but there is still a significant philosophical difference over who will have control over what happens inside the city of Watsonville," Johnson said.

He said he thought negotiations had reached an impasse at the last meeting after a "boil over" between the two sides. But both sides want to set a meeting date for sometime next week, he said.

Meanwhile, city officials have delayed filing official court papers answering the county's challenge in hopes that a settlement can be reached soon.

City officials had until Sept. 6 (exactly 30 working days after the suit was filed) to file a response. That filing date has been postponed, according to City Attorney Don Haile.

Haile wouldn't discuss the details of the negotiations when asked about the progress Tuesday. But he did say the two sides are working toward a settlement.

There had been some delays in meetings between the feuding agencies because Soldo was not able to attend several meetings, Haile said.

Also, Johnson and his partner, Chuck Allen, were out of town last week.

County officials could not be reached for comment this morning.