

Airport commission gets approval from city, county

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WATSONVILLE — Converting 330-acre Watsonville Municipal Airport to housing will be a key issue facing the soon-to-be formed joint city-county airport commission.

Watsonville will be well represented on the seven-member commission. The City Council Tuesday night OK'd the make-up of the commission. Earlier Tuesday, the county Board of Supervisors approved the proposal.

The commission was prompted by a long-standing debate among south county residents concerning the usefulness of Watsonville Municipal Airport, the county's only airport. Airport-area residents also have complained about noise and

safety of the airport.

While south county housing activists are advocating a plan to build 1,870 homes on the airport adjacent Highway 1 and Airport Boulevard, the responsibilities of the airport commission are not exclusive to looking at such a conversion.

However, one of the duties of the commission, according to its description, will be "jointly eliminating or mitigating noise to the greatest degree possible."

The commission, whose establishment is mandated by state law, will also advise the Watsonville council and county supervisors on development proposals within a two-mile radius of the airport.

The commission is to report back in four to six months.

Although Watsonville owns the airport, the county controls much of the surrounding land. Development could increase noise and safety factors around the airport, both of which have been a source of complaints from airport-area residents.

The City Selection Committee, comprised of the mayors of all four cities in the county, will make two commission appointments. Airport Manager Kim Wirht will nominate two other members, both of whom will have aviation expertise and both of whom will be finalized by the Watsonville council.

The Board of Supervisors will appoint two members, and the six members of the commission will appoint a member from the general public.