

Watsonville's newest residents have high hopes for annexation

A little bit of FREEDOM



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Youngsters at play along Carey Avenue in Freedom do not have the luxury of sidewalks for safety. But after being annexed by Watsonville on the first of the month, the area is now eligible for city services, and will benefit from a 30-year redevelopment plan.

By JULIET LEYBA
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE

Freedom

For the past five years, Robert Ferro and his wife have worried about their two small children, who walk to and from their school bus stop on busy Carey Avenue, which has no sidewalks.

"This street is like a freeway," Ferro said. "The speed limit is 25 mph but cars are always racing back and forth and there is no place to walk safely."

Ferro said he also worries about the increase in crime he has seen in his neighborhood over the last two years.

"One morning last month I discovered a stranger sleeping on the sofa in our back yard with beer cans strewn at his feet. We waited for over 30 minutes for the county sheriff to arrive and remove him."

But the Ferros are hoping things will change — now that they are residents of Watsonville.

At midnight on June 30 the largest annexation in Watsonville history took effect and the Ferro home in the 2200 block of Carey became part of the city.

The 120-acre neighborhood includes about 2,000 residents and 600 homes. According to city



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officials, the Freedom-Carey annexation brings the total city population up to about 40,000.

Ferro said the annexation came just in time.

"The neighborhood has started to get real scary," he said. "There's a lot of people hanging around just waiting for the right time to do something bad. Too many thugs and drugs and not enough police."

Now that the area is officially part of Wat-

sonville, Ferro and other residents get the benefit of closer police service.

Using new tax income from the area, the Watsonville City Council agreed to hire three additional police officers to serve the neighborhood.

The annexation, which took nine years to complete, came about at the request of the residents living in the area between Freedom Boulevard, Green Valley Road and Airport Boulevard.

"We felt like we

were a lost area, surrounded on three sides by Watsonville and still paying heavy taxes and levies to the county," said new Watsonville resident and preacher Danny White, who has been involved in the process from the start.

Ferro, White and other new city residents also will benefit when it comes time to pay their electric, street-sweeping and garbage bills. Utility

Please see **ANNEXATION** on **BACK PAGE**

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Annexation: Watsonville to hire more cops for new neighborhood

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taxes for the services will drop about 7 percent and water costs will fall 10 percent.

In addition to becoming part of the city, the newly annexed area will also be included in the city's recently approved redevelopment plan.

"This means that the redevelopment agency will get more money from taxes and be able to plow more money into improvements in the

area," said Pat McCormick, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Local Area Formation Commission, the agency that oversaw the annexation.

Eric Frost, administrative service director for Watsonville, said the annexation will generate approximately \$300,000 a year for the city.

"The area needs about \$3 million worth of street and infrastructure repairs, so we'll probably break even by the end of the 30 year redevelopment

plan," he said.

City Councilman Chuck Carter, who represents one-third of the 2,000 residents in the area, said he hopes a big part of the new revenue will go toward public safety and services.

"The three most important requests we've received from residents are: more police, more after school and recreational programs and a mentoring program for kids," he said.

To commemorate the annexation,

the city will hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 9:30 a.m. July 20 in the parking lot of the new library at Freedom Avenue and Green Valley Road.

Ferro said he thinks the change will help the neighborhood and his family.

"Now when I have a problem I can go to the city," he said. "It's closer than Santa Cruz (where county government offices are based) and there's less bureaucracy."