

City gets OK for expansion

Kerana Todorov, American Canyon Eagle, 6-10-10

American Canyon's future city limits can expand northward and eastward by several hundred acres, allowing the development of up to 1,000 houses, according to the agency that approves Napa County boundary changes.

After the city and county reached agreement last week, on Monday the Napa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) voted 5-0 to include a total of more than 500 acres of unincorporated land — about 300 acres north of Green Island Road and another 200 acres east of the city into American Canyon's future boundaries, an area known as the city's sphere of influence.

Speakers at the meeting focused on an area east of Highway 29 and south of Watson Lane, the site of the much-discussed "Town Center," a residential and commercial development near the former basalt factory. Supporters of including the land into the sphere of influence said it cannot be used for agriculture. Residents have long expected a town center development and supporters argue that urbanization near the city helps protect agricultural land in unincorporated Napa County.

"It makes sense for everyone involved," Napa County Supervisor Keith Caldwell, who grew up in American Canyon.

McGrath Development had initially proposed developing about 100 acres in the area, including 30 acres already in the city limits, but those plans were shelved three years ago. Two years ago American Canyon reached a boundary agreement with Napa County. That map, which the American Canyon City Council ratified in 2008, included twice as much land for the Town Center. The developer has filed no new application.

Napa LAFCO's Executive Officer Keene Simonds last month recommended against including additional acreage south of Watson Lane in the city's new sphere of influence partly because it was unclear how American Canyon could provide the area with city services. On Monday, Simonds reversed his recommendation, saying he had received more information from city officials.

According to his report, Simonds wrote "it is reasonable to assume the type and density of residential development in the (Town Center) portion would be similar to the nearby Vintage Ranch subdivision. This type and density pattern would result in up to 1,026 single-family units."

Monday's vote came after American Canyon and Napa county officials reached a deal on future, state-mandated housing requirements and sharing future property tax revenues.

On June 1, the American Canyon City Council approved an agreement with Napa County to accept 368 housing units, including affordable and moderately priced units. The city and the American Canyon Fire Protection District will split the property tax revenues with the county as the assessed values increase with development. The city and the fire district will retain all retail sales tax revenues. Under the agreement, Napa County agreed to support the eventual annexation of the "Town Center/Lower Watson" area.

Among those voting Monday were Napa County supervisors Brad Wagenknecht and Mark Luce, both of whom are county representatives to Napa LAFCO.

The tax-sharing agreement is the same as that under the 2008 memorandum of understanding negotiated to settle disagreement over the city's northern boundaries.

In 1999, American Canyon residents voted for a town center. The area is part of the city's 1994 general plan — the blueprint for future development.

Supervisor Caldwell, who said he used to swim in the quarry near the old cement factory ruins, urged LAFCO to include the Town Center/Lower Watson area in the city's new sphere of influence. Agriculture did not work for that property, he said, referring to efforts to plant grapes on the land.

"I think this is a project that has gone full circle," he said.

While the commission agreed that more than 500 acres should eventually become part of American Canyon, the panel excluded another 100 acres along the eastern hills from the city's influence. The 100 acres, shaped as a panhandle, includes 35 acres co-owner Edward Biggs has discussed developing into a residential subdivision. Biggs' attorney, David Gilbreth, urged Napa LAFCO to include the unincorporated land, saying the area should be under the city's jurisdiction, but the commission felt otherwise.

"I see no rush to do it today," said Commissioner Brian Kelly.

After the meeting Gilbreth said he and his client will continue to work with the city.

"We'll continue to work with them . That's what we're going to be doing."