

■ SANTA MARIA CITY COUNCIL

Feedlot price: \$1.82/month

Benefit-assessment district on its way

By Christine Bedell
Times Staff Writer

Santa Maria's city attorney says \$1.82 a month bought him a can of air freshener to chase away the smell of the Williams Feedlot when he lived in northwest Santa Maria.

Now it'll buy the current residents of that area an end to the stinky business altogether.

The Santa Maria City Council unanimously agreed Thursday to form a benefit-assessment district and charge the property owners inside it \$1.82 a month to buy out Bob Williams' 30-year-old operation.

It's the closest the city has come to resolving the stink over the feedlot's odor, dust and flies in 10 years.

"This thing is going to get done and it's going to get done now," Councilman Joe Centeno told the crowd, which at one point swelled to more than 150.

Notices now will go out to the people who live, work and own property in the proposed district, which if formally approved at a future City Council meeting would cover areas north of Donovan

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Chuck Wagner,
resident

Road and west of Broadway.

If more than half of the owners of those 2,750 properties protest in writing, however, the city by law cannot form the district.

The plan is expected to come back to the council for final ratification in early August and if OK'd, the feedlot would be gone by March 1997, City Attorney Art Montandon said.

"We're one step closer," Williams said Friday, adding he felt both sad and relieved by the news. But until the deal is sealed, he said, "It's business as usual."

Thursday's vote — taken at a lengthy workshop at Ontiveros

School — followed a straw poll of those in attendance. By a 10-to-1 margin, they cheered "Aye!"

"It's a reasonable solution to a difficult problem," said resident Chuck Wagner. "It's not the best solution, but it's a reasonable solution devised by reasonable people."

The small but vocal minority of assessment opponents remained firm, however. Many called for expanding the district boundaries.

"I understand wanting to get it shut down as soon as possible," said resident Sam Smith, "but there's no reason that man should get a penny."

The city now will negotiate the final details of the buyout with Williams' lawyer and his landlord, Richard Donovan.

Conditions likely will include a guarantee the property is cleaned up properly, used in the future for a specific, non-animal-feedlot-like-purpose, and that the city will withhold payment for non-compliance.

Williams already has agreed to shut down the feedlot for \$600,000 paid out over 10 years — \$477,130 for the value of the business

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plus 5.5 percent interest payments. The feedlot was appraised at \$785,000 in 1994.

If the council ratifies the deal, the first charges will be assessed on the December 1997 property tax bills. It would equal 6 cents a day, \$1.82 a month, \$21.82 a year and a total \$218.18 at the end of 10 years.

The alternative to an assessment district would be to file a nuisance suit against Williams and Donovan, but that would take two to three years and in the end only would require the feedlot be operated "in a more efficient manner," Montandon said.

One resident didn't like either option — though the crowd was befuddled by his logic.

"I bought a house in the northwest for two reasons — because I liked the house and I liked the odor," Robert Small told the council with just a hint of a smile. "I think the city should pay me for eliminating the feedlot."

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