

# The Mercury

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## Outsiders decided East Palo Alto's fate

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By Jack Sirica  
Staff Writer

East Palo Alto failed to become the 20th city in San Mateo County on Tuesday largely because of 137 Menlo Park residents who couldn't have become residents of the new city.

Those residents voted overwhelmingly to reject one of four ballot measures on the incorporation question — all of which had to pass for the effort to succeed. The rejected proposal, Measure C, would have dissolved the East Palo Alto Sanitary District, which serves most of the 19,000 residents of the proposed city as well as the residents of Menlo Park's Precinct 6.

But the residents of that quiet, middle-class neighborhood apparently feared the higher user fees that opponents of incorporation predicted would be im-

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### Drive for incorporation lost when non-residents in same sewage district rejected related measure

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posed by the new city government. They voted 137 to 22 against disbanding the present sanitary district.

Their vote on that single proposal — which lost by only 41 votes — was enough to kill the incorporation effort, at least for now.

Precinct 6 wasn't the only area to vote against the sanitation proposal. Five other precincts — including two other unincorporated areas west of the freeway

that wouldn't have become part of the new city — also voted against the measure, although not as heavily as did Precinct 6.

"Everytime I think about it, it just blows my mind," said Barbara Mouton, East Palo Alto's mayor and an incorporation advocate. "Those who have no vested interest should not vote on whether we live or die as a city."

The defeat of the incorporation effort was particularly painful since voters easily had approved another measure to "reorganize" — or incorporate — the primarily black and Hispanic community. That proposal passed 1,587 to 1,238.

Because they live in the city of Menlo Park, the 437 registered voters of Precinct 6 were not permitted to vote on that measure.

The campaign focused on finances. Opponents said that a new city would have to charge heavy user fees to keep its own sewer and water-treatment system operating. But those opponents didn't say precisely how large those extra fees would be.

Arn Cenedella, a 27-year-old Menlo Park real-estate salesman who led the anti-incorporation forces, said Wednesday that he didn't "really know" the likely

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# Non-residents' vote crucial in East Palo Alto measure

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amounts of those fees. Cenedella lives in a town-house complex west of Highway 101 that would have become part of an incorporated city of East Palo Alto.

"There have been estimates of \$54 per year, but I don't believe it," Cenedella said. "They aren't based on spending any money to improve the sewer system.

"The (sewer) lines are what's known as 'running full,'" Cenedella added. "The system needs massive work . . . You're talking lots of money. You hate to bring it all down to dollars, but unfortunately that's what incorporation is. It's a corporation."

Propositions B and D, dissolving the waterworks and recreation dis-

tricts, passed by wide margins. Angus McDonald, a Berkeley management consultant, recommended to the San Mateo Local Agency Formation Commission that all three districts be dissolved to bring needed tax revenue to the new city.

Fees for the sanitary district, for example, are included in property taxes that East Palo Alto residents now pay to San Mateo County. If East Palo Alto had become an incorporated area, those property taxes — which amount to about \$100,000 per year — would have reverted to the city.

McDonald said he would have preferred a simpler ballot. But the convoluted boundaries of the various service districts made that impossible.

The present sanitation district covers most of East Palo Alto, as well as Precinct 6 in Menlo Park. But state law requires that all persons affected by a dissolution measure be allowed to vote on the proposal.

In the last weeks of the campaign, incorporation opponents began to stress the sanitation district issue more heavily. Joseph T. Sanders, the present head of the sanitation district, joined a last-minute campaign to distribute leaflets. So did Gertrude Wilks and Henry Anthony, prominent members of East Palo Alto's current advisory council.

One anti-incorporation leaflet warned that the creation of a city would "cause water and sewer service fees to be raised. Even if you don't pay these fees, your landlord will pass them on to you."

Supporters said they would attempt once again to get an incorporation measure on the ballot.

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