

EAST PALO ALTO
PORTRAIT OF A POLITICALLY DISENFRANCHISED COMMUNITY

Why is East Palo Alto in the unenviable position it finds itself today? One of the major explanations lies in the fact that East Palo Alto's population of 20,000, which is more than 60 percent Negro in a county of 5,000,000 (mainly white), has had no significant political representation. Its residents, moreover, have been in a disadvantaged economic position, and their interests, largely for that reason, have been different from and often antagonistic to those of most of San Mateo County's residents.

As an unincorporated area, East Palo Alto is directly under the jurisdiction of the County Board of Supervisors--men who are elected at large, that is, by the whole county, rather than the residents of the district they are supposed to represent. In addition, the district in which East Palo Alto is located separates it from some other areas in the county (though not all) with similar interests--for example, East San Mateo and East Redwood City. If these, together with East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, were contained in a district in which their Negro and other low-income populations constituted a majority, and if members of the Supervisors were elected directly by the districts rather than at large, candidates who really represented the interests of these communities could be elected to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors.

Political Disenfranchisement

But, of course, such a situation is at best very far off. So today, as in the past, East Palo Altans are never represented, in the only government they have, by men who share their interests or are responsible to them. This state of affairs has been at the root of events such as the annexation by Menlo Park and Palo Alto of valuable or potentially valuable land which was part of East Palo Alto--all with the approval or acquiescence of the supposedly responsible County officials.

East Palo Alto vs. San Mateo County

The relationship of East Palo Alto to San Mateo County might be compared to that of former colonial areas to their European masters. Their colonial interests were promoted only in so far as they coincided with those of the mother country--otherwise they were ignored.

East Palo Alto's first unpleasant encounter with external forces occurred in 1949 when the area's first major industry, the Hiller Aircraft plant, which had moved into the area in 1949, and the residential section of Belle Haven were annexed to Menlo Park. A long nine years elapsed before another attack was to take place, but the long delay was compensated for by the blow that was unleashed. Not only Menlo Park, representing San Mateo County, but also Palo Alto, representing Santa Clara County, took part in the conspiracy which stripped East Palo Alto of its shore line and prime industrial property. In 1958 Menlo Park annexed the area in the North of East Palo Alto known as Kavanaugh Industrial Park, and in 1964 Palo Alto annexed the airport, golf course, and recreational area to the South.

Now lacking the industrial and commercial tax base which appeared necessary for incorporation, it seemed that East Palo Alto had no choice but to continue to be victimized while maintaining a certain degree of hope that those who had taken from them might share the profits by annexing the entire area of East Palo Alto. Such was not to be the case, however.

The Formation of LAFCO

In 1963 the legislature of the State of California passed a law making mandatory the setting up, in each county of the state, a Local Area Formation Committee (LAFCO) which would have to report upon any proposed annexations or incorporations and make studies to determine their desirability. That this agency has been at least partly successful in defending the interests of East Palo Alto is testified to by their recent LAFCO hearings and report concerning the proposed annexation to Menlo Park of the last major commercial area remaining in East Palo Alto, the east of the Bayshore Freeway. Thanks to the findings of the San Mateo County LAFCO, this attempt at further piecemeal annexation, or salami tactics, which would have still further eroded the potential tax base of an independent East Palo Alto, was defeated, at least for the time being.

Education

Another of the important problems plaguing East Palo Alto involves the schools. In this pamphlet it is not possible to go into all the things that are wrong with East Palo Alto's schools. People are probably more aware of the school problem than any other issue in the community-as was evidenced in the recent election of Hoover and Kabat to the Ravenswood Elementary School Board. We can, however, discuss briefly the situation with regard to Ravenswood High School.

There are two alternatives available for attempting to solve the Ravenswood issue: phasing out Ravenswood and bussing children from East Palo Alto to other schools in the Sequoia District or obtaining control of the funds allotted by the District for Ravenswood and electing an East Palo Alto School Board to run the school.

The relative merits of each proposal have been discussed a great deal in East Palo Alto, so that more of the same is not necessary here. What can we say that is new is based on an informal poll of East Palo Altans and other Sequoia School District residents. The overwhelming majority of East Palo Altans interviewed (over 100) preferred gaining control of Ravenswood by residents of East Palo Alto. The same was true for most of the people interviewed in the rest of the district, e.g. Portolla Valley, Woodside, etc.). No one interviewed outside of East Palo Alto wanted to see East Palo Altan children bussed outside of East Palo Alto to school. The only people who were skeptical about East Palo Alto's running Ravenswood were some of the East Palo Altans who weren't sure if there were enough qualified people in East Palo Alto to administer Ravenswood properly. No one outside East Palo Alto expressed this doubt.

Annexation to Palo Alto or Menlo Park?

Interviews of this sort helped us get an idea of how East Palo Altans viewed a much talked-about suggestion for solving the other problems of East Palo Alto-and these, as in the case of the school issue, have a great deal to do with the feasibility of the suggestion-namely annexation of East Palo Alto to Palo Alto. Of the hundred or more residents of Palo Alto who were polled, most were opposed to annexing East Palo Alto, for a variety of reasons ranging from "Palo Alto would never annex East Palo Alto" to "the people over there couldn't afford the taxes." In East Palo Alto, where about the same number of people were interviewed, more residents favored annexation to Palo Alto than any other alternative (annexation to Menlo Park, incorporation, remaining unincorporated).

Incorporation

The fourth alternative for East Palo Alto is to incorporate. On the one hand, the citizens would have to take on several expenses now carried by the county. These would include (1) police service, (2) engineering and roads, (3) planning and zoning, and (4) building inspection. Also, new expenses would be created in hiring an administrative staff for the city and in purchasing public buildings. It is estimated that the annual cost of running the new city would be roughly \$600,000.

On the other hand, the city would get increased revenues, such as sales tax return, gasoline tax return, and traffic fines. The estimated additional revenues for the city would be \$578,000---leaving a \$26,728 deficit to be recovered in some fashion.

Despite the expected deficit it is feasible for East Palo Alto to incorporate. There is a reasonable expectation that the deficit would be recovered rapidly in the savings from the central administration of the lighting, sanitation, and water districts. The City Manager Board of Brisbane has estimated that since Brisbane incorporated in 1961, it has been possible to reduce the average tax rate \$2 per \$100 of assessment--this because of the increased efficiency of administering services.

Summary and Recommendation

Of the four alternatives open to East Palo Alto, the fourth is the most practical. Preserving the status quo would just mean more of the same: a high tax rate purchasing low quality services; no voice in government; and no community organization to meet the needs of the citizens in depth (for instance, providing health services, providing additional education for those who need it, welfare, counseling, and so forth). The other two alternatives, annexation to Menlo Park or Palo Alto, can be no more than long term goals. There is little chance that annexation would take place within the next ten years. In the meantime East Palo Alto would remain in the position it now finds itself.

Ranking of alternatives facing East Palo Alto in terms of four criteria:

| | Level of services | Costs to EPA taxpayers | Political autonomy | Feasibility |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Remaining Unincorporated | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Annexation to Menlo Park | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Annexation to Palo Alto | 1 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Incorporation | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

Incorporation is the alternative with the best chance of being approved and of immediately improving East Palo Alto. Incorporation would mean a small increase in taxes for the property owners of East Palo Alto--around \$20 for a family with property totalling \$4,000--but it could be accomplished NOW. For the additional cost, the taxpayer would get better services, a voice in his own government, and a chance to enjoy such new services as he would choose to support. If the citizens approved, the recommendations of the Citizens for Self-Government, their government would go far beyond administering utilities, etc., to providing counseling, project leadership, educational aids, and new employment opportunities.

In Menlo Park we conducted interviews in depth with six residents concerning their views on the annexation issue. The only persons who expressed approval of the idea of annexing East Palo Alto were two young men of between 25 and 30 years of age, neither of whom owned any property. The other four residents, including a Negro woman, said they would not vote for annexation, primarily because it would raise their taxes. Cut problems of law enforcement and Negro voting power were also mentioned.

How do East Palo Altans View Their Problems?

No one knows more about what has happened and what is wrong in East Palo Alto and San Mateo County than the people of East Palo Alto themselves. The following quotations are based on interviews conducted by members of the Stanford Experiment Seminar on East Palo Alto v. San Mateo County.

Shelby Givens, Community Organizer: "But in terms of the leadership, this must come from within the structure of the group (the Welfare Rights Organization). We are not here to direct. INFO is only here to assist. If an organization is to be self-sustaining, then the members must learn to operate on their own. That is, whatever resources they may be lacking, we try to at least get them to it, or provide it for them, but in terms of the leadership, this must come from within the structure of the group. The reason for our (INFO's) existence is the tremendous failure of agencies which have failed to meet the needs of the community. This is the kind of thing that attempts to supplement the lack of function. There is, of course, tremendous apathy and distrust, and rightfully so, between the people and the agencies which deal with them."

Ed Becks, Community Organizer: "Three years ago I was sent to the Citizens Committee on Ethnic Problems, a Commission set up to do something about de facto segregation. So I went there and I fought like hell, and we came up with the idea of phasing out Ravenswood. By the time this filtered down to the grass roots level, it was dead as a possibility in terms of being able to mobilize right then and move while the issue was hot. Well now at the grass roots level they're talking about phasing out the school, but the proposal is three years old. So it would have been more meaningful to have gotten a hundred people together and gone down and thrown bricks at the school building. But you might burn the school down and still nothing would occur. If a number of people threatened the existence of those people at the county and state level, they would have to do something to guarantee their safety. Really, we are so powerless that it is terribly difficult to get anyone to listen to our problems."

David Mouton, Student: "What would I like to see done? I'd like to see it turn into a black community - a good black community, where whatever we need done, we could do it ourselves. We can have our own combined East Palo Alto-Menlo Park. We can make it a real nice place to live, so when people come to East Palo Alto, they'll say: "This is a real nice place, and it's a Negro community."

Lloyd Hudson: "You don't have the cooperation from the police force. They're responsible to the county and not to the individual who lives in the community. They don't handle people like they should, because...they don't care. They may be on this end today and they may not be back here in the next six months. They don't care how they handle you, and they misuse you. If we had a police force here that knew the people and the people knew them, and they were regular people, there would be better understanding."

Mrs. Gertrude Wilkes, Mothers for Equal Education: "The Day School has given East Palo Alto something to bargain from. We've been told that our kids can't learn, they won't, they don't want to learn. "We can't get them to do this." I can stand toe to toe with this man and tell him - you're a liar. If you don't believe it, come and see for yourself. I couldn't tell this a year ago."

Bernie Allen, psycologist: "A year ago, I knew some students who had been at Menlo-Atherton High School, and I was delighted because they were going to Menlo-Atherton rather than Ravenswood High School. I thought that at Menlo-Atherton they were getting a good education because Menlo-Atherton has excellent teachers, good counse- lers, and a very large percentage of the student body go on to college. But as the months went on, and I talked to the student about their classes and what they were learning in classes, where the Negro kids were going to classes, I realized that Menlo-Atherton, for the Negro student, wasn't the good school that it was for the white student."

If these interviews go some distance in giving an idea of what sorts of things East Palo Alto residents must consider in trying to decide which way they want to go, it is clear they don't tell the whole, or even a major part of the story. The next section will, for this reason, go into some of the relevant facts about East Palo Alto's situation and the feasibility and advisability of the various proposals for solving problems about which East Palo Altans are concerned.

POLITICAL CHOICES RACING EAST PALO ALTO

East Palo Alto has four choices as a community. It can (1) remain an unincorp- orated area, (2) annex to Menlo Park), (3) annex to Palo Alto, or (4) incorporate as a city with itsown municipal government. Each of these alternatives should be looked at in terms of economic costs, policial autonomy, feasibility, and benefits to the citizen of East Palo Alto.

The Status Quo

If East Palo Alto stayed as it is, lettle would change in the area. The services provided citizens of East Palo Alto are similar to those provided in incorporated areas except that those provided East Palo Altans are supplied through private agencies or the county.

Tax rates paid in East Palo Alto for municipal services (per \$100 assessed valuation):

| | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Library | .1496 |
| Lighting | .0996 |
| Recreation | .4500 |
| Police | .2757 |
| Fire Department | .5544 |
| Sanitation District | .2000 |
| Recreation | .0598 |
| <u>Total</u> | <u>1.8091</u> |

Typical composite rates for services in selected cities (\$ per \$100 assessed valuation):

| | |
|------------|--------|
| Brisbane | 1.3496 |
| Daly City | 1.9633 |
| Atherton | 1.9935 |
| San Bruno | 1.7425 |
| San Carlos | 1.0693 |

Note: The rate of assessment in San Mateo County is 25% of estimated market value.

The composite tax rate for East Palo Alto is in the middle range of municipal service rates paid by residents of San Mateo County. However, due to the low assessments in East Palo Alto, the average per capita tax is the lowest in the county.

Actual per capita taxes paid by residents of selected communities:

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| East Palo Alto | \$103.30 |
| Brisbane | 273.39 |
| Menlo Park | 261.52 |
| South San Francisco | 222.00 |
| Woodside | 497.59 |

Since East Palo Alto is unincorporated some of the services for which the residents of a city normally pay are provided by the county. These include (1) engineering and roads, (2) library, (3) police protection, (4) planning and zoning, and (5) building inspection.

The total revenue from East Palo Alto taxpayers is \$231,538.75. The County provides \$343,835.25 to pay for services to the area not financed by local taxes.

Low Quality Services: It would seem from the above that East Palo Altans are getting a bargain for the amount that they pay out in taxes. However there are numerous hidden costs. First, the services provided in East Palo Alto are of low quality compared with other areas of the county; in addition, other revenues that would normally accrue to a city are paid to the county. For instance, an estimated \$100,000 in sales taxes from East Palo Alto are paid to the county.

Salami Tactics Erode Tax Base: As an unincorporated area East Palo Alto is gradually losing its best taxable properties. In 1958, Menlo Park annexed the Kavanaugh Industrial Park, a piece of property valued at \$1,845,963. The total assessment of all East Palo Alto is only \$23,000,000. At a rate of \$1.00 per \$100, East Alto loses \$20,000 per year that could be paid for better municipal services. In 1949, United Aircraft Company, was annexed--to Menlo Park. In 1960, Palo Alto annexed baylands for their airport, golf course, and yacht club.

Services Provided on Piecemeal Basis: Perhaps the greatest liability of the current situation is that services are provided to East Palo Alto in a piecemeal basis. Streets are haphazardly maintained, drainage is unplanned. This situation is a result of the fact that there is no government body to represent the interest of East Palo Alto. The lack of a government probably saves the taxpayer some money (this will be discussed later), but he bears the hidden costs of low quality services and arbitrary development of the area.

Annexation to Menlo Park

The second alternative for East Palo Alto is to annex to Menlo Park. This would almost double the population of Menlo Park while it would add less than 20% to its taxable properties. It would add a maximum of about 30% in other revenues to Menlo Park government funds. If services to East Palo Alto were to be raised to the level of Menlo Park, then taxes in both areas would have to be raised. The municipal service charge for citizens of Menlo Park would have to be raised from .700 to 1.211 or an overall change of 2.1143. For citizens of East Palo Alto this would be an increase in tax rate of 23052, that is, \$.30 per \$100 of net property value. These increases in cost do not include estimates of capital improvements that would probably be financed by bond issues.

The advantage of this arrangement is that East Palo Alto would receive a much higher level of services. They would be well represented in the city government especially since they would have many common interests with the residents of Bellhaven.

The disadvantages are mainly in terms of feasibility. The annexation would have to be approved by the Local Area Formation Committee and the state legislature after a vote of the citizens of Menlo Park. Since the annexation of East Palo Alto would greatly increase the tax burden of Menlo Park and make Menlo Park predominantly Negro, it is unlikely that most citizens of Menlo Park would vote for the annexation of East Palo Alto. In our interviews, we found that only people under 30 showed any interest in bearing this increased burden.

Annexation to Palo Alto

The same basic set of circumstances prevail with regard to annexation to Palo Alto. Two things are different -- (1) Palo Alto residents have a much higher level of services than people of Menlo Park and the added financial burden of East Palo Alto would cost the individual citizen even more; (2) Palo Altans are better able to pay for the increases than the citizens of Menlo Park.

The current population of Palo Alto is 56,000 and its assessed valuation is \$244,000,000. The population of East Palo Alto is 21,000 and its assessed valuation is \$21,000,000. Thus a 35% increase in population would add only about 10% of new revenues from property. The increases in nonproperty revenues from property. The increase in nonproperty revenues by East Palo Alto's annexing to Palo Alto would also be around 10%.

In the Palo Alto charter it is required that the city own and operate its utilities. The cost for a new electrical plant for East Palo Alto would be around \$2,500,000 which would have to be financed by the citizens through a bond issue. The increase in annual operating expenses to each citizen of Palo Alto would be .33, raising the city tax rate to 1.11. The costs of the bonds would be added onto this.

The economic advantages to East Palo Alto would be great. A much, much higher level of services would be provided at a minimal cost to the citizen of East Palo Alto. The citizens of Palo Alto are better equipped to shoulder the financial problems of East Palo Alto than is the city of Menlo Park. The population of East Palo Alto would secure a fair representation in the city council of Menlo Park. The disadvantages are, again, feasibility and autonomy. It seems very unlikely that the citizens of Palo Alto would vote to take on a predominantly Negro financial liability. In terms of autonomy, annexation to Palo Alto must rank third after incorporation and after annexation to Menlo Park. This is because the voting powers of East Palo Alto residents would be relatively small compared to that of the 56,000 middle and upper class Palo Altans.

The only hope for this option if the recommendation of the Local Area Formation Committee be accepted. This agency, created by the state legislature recommended that East Palo Alto be annexed to Palo Alto after turning down a petition to annex the triangular area to Menlo Park.

In any case, East Palo will probably be incorporated into some area within fifteen years. The question is whether the East Palo Altans are willing to wait that long to improve their condition.

Details on Past Annexations

In January 1949, Menlo Park annexed two areas which were then part of unincorporated East Palo Alto. Under Menlo Park City Ordinances 177 and 178, Belle Haven City and Suburban Park were incorporated into the city of Menlo Park. Belle Haven City was the area of primary concern to Menlo Park, for it included within it a Veterans Administration Hospital, a branch of the Southern Pacific Railway and the Hiller Aircraft Company.

A handful of residents in the Belle Haven area petitioned to the city of Menlo Park for annexation and the city councilmen Brown, Burgess, Ford, Hayes and Church unanimously accepted the petition and set a date for an election by residents of the area. The election of January 14, 1949, showed 280 votes for annexation and 213 votes against, and thus on January 26, 1949, Belle Haven City lost its unincorporated status and became part of Menlo Park.

Nine and a half years later in May of 1958 Menlo Park Councilmen Andrus, Belangie, Bonde, Lawson (present Mayor), and Plaisted unanimously passed Ordinance 306 which incorporated Kavanaugh Industrial Park, previously part of East Palo Alto, to the city of Menlo Park. The petition for annexation was signed by Clarence and Gertrude Kavanaugh and the transaction was handled by the Land Title Company of San Mateo County. Being a non-residential and uninhabited area, no election was necessary and the Menlo Park City Council merely met the request of Mr. and Mrs. Kavanaugh.

But what is of further interest is that Menlo Park also annexed the baylands (shoreline) along the easterly borders of East Palo Alto, stretching southward to the border of San Mateo County and the City of Palo Alto. This area has great recreational and industrial potential from which it appears that East Palo Alto will never benefit.

In 1962 San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties began negotiations which on November 15, 1963, terminated in two county boundary changes. Santa Clara County obtained the unincorporated area owned by Palo Alto in East Palo Alto which included the Palo Alto Airport, a municipal golf course, sewage treatment plant, yacht harbor, and considerable vacant land. In exchange, San Mateo received some 300 acres of land where Skyline Blvd, and Page Mill Road intersect. It is quite clear that this exchange was not in the interests of East Palo Alto even if it was a fair bargain so far as the two counties were concerned. This emphasizes the fact the the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County was quite capable of defending county interests, but having no incentive whatsoever to represent the interests of East Palo Alto, the Supervisors quite simply ignored them.

The maneuver which gave Santa Clara County its possession was no simple matter politically. The problem which arose was a legal one, since California State law stipulates that Lands which may be transferred from one county to another must be a least five or more miles removed from the county seat of the transferring party, and with Redwood City as the county seat of San Mateo County being less than five miles removed, this transfer was illegal. Thus, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties appealed their case to the State Legislature for reconsideration. A bill was presented on the floor of the legislature by Assemblyman Clark Bradley of San Jose which requested the desired boundary change and stipulated the benefits and reasons for the proposal. Assemblymen Carl Britschgi of Redwood City attacked the proposal on the grounds that the boundary change would deprive East Palo Alto of valuable land or recreational and industrial potential. Much to the chagrin of Mr. Britschgi the bill passed the legislature and on November 15, 1963, the boundary changes were effected. Then in 1964, the city of Palo Alto annexed the entire area.

The incorporation would not affect the chance that East Palo Alto would be annexed to Menlo Park or Palo Alto at a later date. In fact, should East Palo Altans consider this desirable, it is likely that the fastest path to annexation is via incorporation. It is only by obtaining experience in self-government, in building community pride, and in improving both the image which East Palo Alto presents to outsiders and the reality of community life for its citizens that East Palo can become a community which other municipalities would seek out as a partner.