

Election date set for June

Incorporation plan for East Palo Alto

By Chris Kenrick
Times Tribune staff

REDWOOD CITY — The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors today unanimously voted to set a June 7 election on the incorporation of East Palo Alto.

The proposed new city is bigger than the area proposed for incorporation last year. The 1982 effort failed by a narrow margin at the polls.

This time, the new city would encompass all of what is currently unincorporated East Palo Alto, including the neighborhoods west of the Bayshore Freeway, both north and south of Euclid Avenue.

Former Congressman Paul N. McCloskey, the lawyer for a coalition opposing incorporation, indicated he may file a lawsuit to block or challenge the election. McCloskey's petition to county officials to reconsider the decision to have a June election was denied today.

County lawyers said they are confident that any court challenge by McCloskey will fail.

"We feel our actions are very legally defensible," said L. M. Summey, lawyer for the county's Local Agency Formation Commission.

The coming election is expected to prompt heavy campaigning in East Palo Alto.

The East Palo Alto Citizens Committee on Incorporation (EPACCI) has been working diligently for more than two years to build a strong community organization in favor of cityhood.

"We've got a lot of work to do — but we'll win in June," said Ruben Abrica, a member of the advisory East Palo Alto Municipal Council. "The opponents of incorporation are appealing to people's fears. We appeal to people's sense of responsibility.

"Incorporation will be a first step to give us the power and responsibility to manage our own affairs. Once we have those two things, that will allow us to begin to make changes in our community and deal with the problems of crime and economics."

Abrica said opponents of cityhood "are underestimating the resolve of the people who are working for incorporation. It will be a victory for the whole community."

Opponents of incorporation, wearing red armbands, indicated their displeasure with the supervisors' decision.

Longtime East Palo Alto political leader Gertrude Wilks, wearing a pink cape with a sign pinned to her back that read "Save our homes, vote no on incorporation," told the board incorporation would be "the most unjust practice imposed on our community."

"I'm here to serve notice on the board that the battle lines have been drawn, the battle is on and we'll fight it out," she said. "If you want to put it in the streets, we'll take care of it."

Wilks said she resented a resolution passed by the Menlo Park City Council in support of incorporation after that city had annexed lands east of the freeway that would have provided a tax base for East Palo Alto.

Other opponents of incorporation complained that they had not been given enough time by county officials to collect the signatures needed to halt incorporation proceedings.

Board of Supervisors Chairman

Arlen Gregorio emphasized that, by law, the board has little discretion in deciding whether to call an incorporation election, because such an election had been recommended by the county's Local Agency Formation Commission.

Under a state law that took effect last month, Gregorio said, the supervisors were bound to accept LAFCO's recommendation unless opponents of an election could present signatures of more than half the registered voters in East Palo Alto.

In an election last April, cityhood was narrowly defeated because of a technicality in the way the complicated ballot measure was drawn up. Ever since then, East Palo Alto has been politically divided because the issue remained unresolved.