

# Local News

## East Palo Alto: A city or part of Menlo Park?

By Phyllis Brown  
Times Tribune staff

### Incorporation vs. annexation debate soon will be decided

EAST PALO ALTO — The year was 1931. The nation was in the middle of the Great Depression, and wine with dinner was against the law. Herbert Hoover was president, although Hoover Tower had not yet been built on the Stanford campus. In the World Series, the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Philadelphia Athletics four games to three. One could rent a two-bedroom house in Palo Alto for \$22.50 a month. In the tiny hamlet that had only six years earlier named itself East Palo Alto, the issue of the day was incorporation

Now, after 50 years of debate, the future of the 2.5-square-mile community probably will be decided within the next 10 months.

By June of 1982, first the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and later the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors probably will have decided whether some 18,000 East Palo Altans should be citizens of the City of East Palo Alto or citizens of Menlo Park.

By June, residents of East Palo Alto, who must ap-

prove incorporation by a majority vote, may well have decided whether they wish to form their own city.

The now-defunct East Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, which in 1931 proposed incorporation, at the same time proposed annexation to Palo Alto as an alternative.

Both ideas were put forth to save the community from a move to consolidate San Mateo and San Francisco counties.

Today, as in 1931, the alternatives are incorpora-

tion and annexation, this time to Menlo Park. As in 1931, those on both sides of the fence — more accurately, the Bayshore Freeway — believe that theirs is the best alternative for the future of the community.

One thing is certain. The county's taxpayers will breathe a sigh of relief when the issue is decided.

In the past year alone, the county has spent almost \$60,000 studying East Palo Alto's future, according to LAFCO executive officer B. Sherman Coffman. That does not include money spent by citizens groups to study the issue.

All arguments for or against incorporation hinge on

Please see DEBATE, B-4

# DEBATE

Continued from B-1

one vital issue: the ability of a City of East Palo Alto to support itself.

One of the most distinguished advocates of incorporation believes that it could.

He is Angus McDonald, head of a Berkeley-based economics and fiscal consulting firm and the chief author of "Spheres of Influence for East Palo Alto."

The almost 90-page report is the most important piece of information the LAFCO commissioners will use to choose between incorporation and annexation to Menlo Park.

McDonald recommends incorporation. Annexation comes in a close second.

His recommendation comes with five conditions. Without them, he believes, incorporation would not be economically feasible.

The five conditions McDonald listed in the report include:

- "Incorporation must occur immediately after July 1, 1982, to maximize the time during which the city accrues revenues but does not incur most of the costs of providing services."

- The county would pay for the new city, in effect, for the first year of its operation.

- "The county of San Mateo would finance major street improvements before incorporation takes place." Those improvements could cost as much as \$6 million.

- "The Menlo Park Fire Protection District would continue to provide fire protection during the first several years of the new city."

- "The entire property tax base of East Palo Alto now accruing to the county would be transferred to the new city."

- "Residents must be willing to pay for utilities through user fees."

All conditions but the last are under the control of either the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors or the LAFCO commissioners.

Assistant County Manager Jay Gellert has stated that the county would be able to meet McDonald's conditions.

The supervisors can vote for East Palo Alto's road improvements, for example.

The LAFCO commissioners can prevent special districts, like the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, from changing their boundaries.

The establishment of user fees could be the first resolution passed by the new city's City Council.

In at least the area of utilities, an incorporated City of East Palo Alto could be more expensive for its citizens.

Citizens of the City of East Palo Alto could pay an additional \$54 a year per household, or \$4.50 a month, for their water and lighting. East Palo Altans now pay for these services on their property tax bills.

Pay a monthly fee would make the city able to the new city.

corporation, most importantly members of the East Palo Citizens' Committee for Incorporation (EPACCI) feel confident that a City of East Palo Alto would be a success.

The utility users fee could even be made unnecessary, they say, if the number of registered voters in East Palo Alto increases by about 2,400 before an incorporation election.

The city's population will be tallied according to the number of registered voters. Federal and state funding is based on population. With more registered voters and a higher population, East Palo Alto would receive more federal and state funding.

East Palo Alto Mayor Barbara Mouton has been at the forefront of the present incorporation effort since its beginning.

"The economic question has been laid to rest. It is now basically a political and racial issue. I think that there is a small portion of the west of Bayshore that does not want to remain in East Palo Alto, for basically racial reasons," Mouton said recently.

East Palo Alto's population is 61.1 percent black; 69 percent of the white population lives west of the freeway.

Incorporation's opponents certainly have their doubts about the viability of an incorporated East Palo Alto. But they flatly deny any racial motivation in their efforts.

They point to locally elected and run governmental bodies, and their poor performance in the past, as reasons why a City of East Palo Alto would not work.

The East Palo Alto Sanitary District, for example, has no routine maintenance schedule, while the West Bay Sanitary District, which serves part of East Palo Alto, cleans every line in its system regularly, they state.

Opponents of incorporation, such as Arn Cendella, who lives in the new Mission Palo Alto condominium project, doubt that there is enough leadership capacity in East Palo Alto to run a city.

He questions whether the creation of a city council will aid in East Palo Alto's economic development, as proponents have stated.

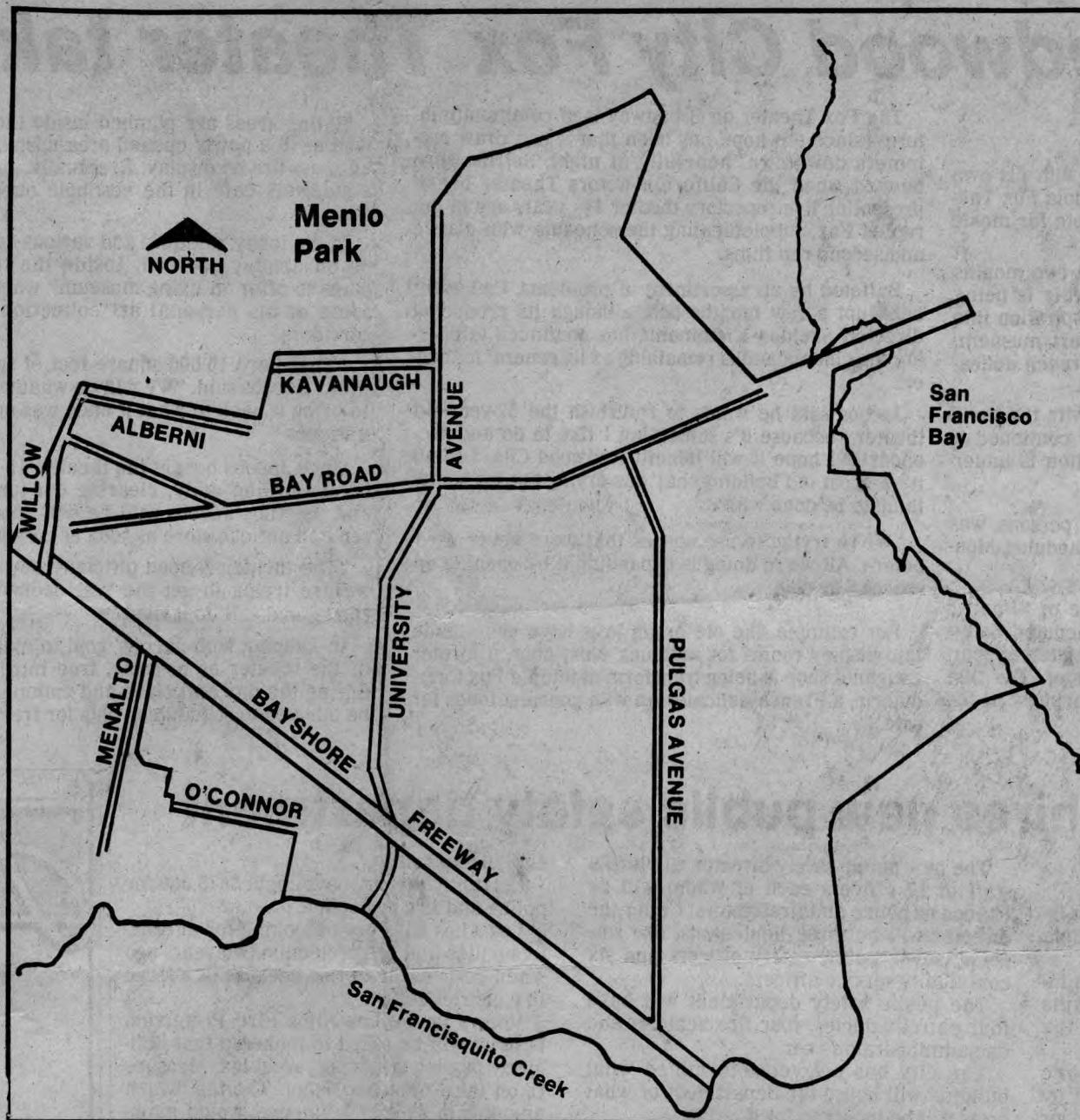
Oponents of East Palo Alto's incorporation promote the known management capabilities of the City of Menlo Park, and present annexation as the only viable alternative.

But proponents of annexation, who live mostly on the west side of the Bayshore Freeway and are mostly white, have little support from the residents of Menlo Park.

Three of Menlo Park's City Council members favor incorporation over annexation and, in a recent meeting on the issue, several Menlo Park residents, including former Menlo Park Mayor Ira Bonde, spoke against annexation.

Menlo Park homeowners' groups have also spoken out against annexation and in favor of incorporation.

The residents of East Palo Alto



Times Tribune map by Mike Sanchez

These are the boundaries of the proposed City of East Palo Alto.

also would have to approve annexation by a simple majority vote.

Though the issue has been discussed for 50 years, it is almost impossible to know what an incorporated city of East Palo Alto would be like.

How would police and fire services be provided?

How would the city's streets and roads be maintained?

Only the City Council of East Palo Alto could determine many of those things. Police services, for example, could be provided in a number of ways.

The new city could contract for police services with the Menlo Park Police Department or the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, or even the Palo Alto Police Department. The City Council could also elect to form its own police department.

The outcome of annexation to Menlo Park is much easier to predict. New citizens of Menlo Park would at least theoretically be privy to the same services that current Menlo Park residents enjoy.

Much more information will be

presented to LAFCO in the coming weeks.

The City of Menlo Park has asked LAFCO staff to provide it with more information on how an incorporated East Palo Alto would affect Menlo Park.

Commission members have asked how likely it is that the board of supervisors would improve East Palo Alto's roads before incorporation.

Not until questions like these have been answered will LAFCO be able to decide East Palo Alto's future.