

# A 50-year debate will end soon in East P.A.

By Phyllis Brown  
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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 approve 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 incorporation 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 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 dis-

tricts, 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.

Proponents of East Palo Alto's incorporation, 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 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.



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