

Comment

A truce on vacancies?

SAN MATEO County supervisors are hoping their decision to let rival factions on East Palo Alto's advisory Municipal Council wrestle with two apparent council vacancies won't backfire on their push for a compromise.

The gaps on the five-member council surfaced because incumbents A. Berkley Driessel and Bradford Stamper moved out of their districts to run for City Council berths last month when incorporation lost by a handful of votes. A slim majority of the Municipal Council — Mayor Barbara Mouton, Driessel and Stamper — had favored incorporation, while the council's other two members, Gertrude Wilks and Henry Anthony, led community opposition to incorporation.

The Driessel and Stamper residency switches brought calls from many community activists urging removal of the pair from their council seats. But county supervisors, who have the power to appoint the council replacements, instead agreed, and pragmatically so, to let the council resolve the matter. Supervisors hurdled part of the problem by accepting Driessel's resignation. But Stamper insists he's still entitled to his seat because he has moved back into his old district. But the supervisors still aren't sure about it. Still, supervisors aren't sure about it

status, and a definite legal clarification should be sought. In the meantime, under the supervisors' conciliatory plan, it's conceivable that Stamper could vote for Driessel's replacement but not on his own.

Supervisor Arlen Gregorio, whose district includes East Palo Alto, was bold in persuading his colleagues to bounce the appointments task to the already-contentious council. But the self-determination principle their decision exemplifies is fully in tune with the common theme of incorporation advocates and foes alike.

The disturbing hitch in the county compromise, however, is that so far there are few middle-grounders in the incorporation hassle. But if there's ever a time for such mediators to emerge, it's now.

A one-vote majority on the council, either for or against incorporation, will continue to provide one side with tremendous leverage in that fiercely emotional campaign, which is likely to be resolved in a more conclusive manner on the November ballot. So let's hope a spirit of compromise will surface on the appointments at East Palo Alto's municipal hall. If not, supervisors will have to be the tiebreakers — a prerogative that most of them prefer not to exercise.