

# Comment

## A second, stronger try

**A**DVOCATES AND opponents of East Palo Alto's incorporation as an independent municipality will make their closing arguments Wednesday to the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission. The panel's subsequent recommendation to county supervisors is expected to be a repeat of its late-1981 verdict for a special election on the issue.

Last April, thanks to the tenacity of a citizens' incorporation committee, municipalization was approved for East Palo Alto by a vote of 1,585 to 1,238, as was the necessary dissolution of the area's water and parks and recreation districts on the same ballot. But the all-or-nothing package was shattered by the simultaneous defeat — by a 41-vote margin — of the measure to also dissolve the East Palo Alto Sanitary District. On that measure, sewer district residents who lived outside the area designated for incorporation were allowed to vote, and their votes were overwhelmingly negative.

Once again, the still-confident cityhood advocates are distressed by LAFCO Executive Director Sherman Coffman's renewed insistence that municipalization of EPA is too risky financially. His reasons and those of anti-incorporation activists are familiar, among them: a nagging recession, East Palo Alto's low per-capita income, high unemployment and small commercial tax base, its lack of success in recruiting industry and in stimulating more local jobs, and the community's many hassles over special district funds and maintenance of community facilities.

Coffman, an ultra-cautious governmental organization specialist, contends

that annexation of East Palo Alto, or portions of it, to more stable Menlo Park would be more logical and beneficial for residents of the unincorporated area.

Coffman has many allies among property owners west of the Bayshore Freeway who long have identified with Menlo Park and prefer inclusion in that more prosperous community. But the prospect of such an annexation is extremely remote. Menlo Park officials have shown little enthusiasm for absorbing the unincorporated areas and none at all for the predominantly black area east of Bayshore. Furthermore, Menlo Park City Council's recent unanimous endorsement of East Palo Alto's incorporation attempt surely was based on more than a detached analysis of the financial realities involved. The areas are far from compatible in many ways.

The basic point, however, remains that the incorporation of East Palo Alto, an area with a strong community of interest and surging pride, makes more sense than a continuance of the community's struggling status quo under remote-control governance from Redwood City. To be sure, the budgeting forecasts are still not terribly reassuring, particularly the uncertainty regarding the federal and state governments' ability, or willingness, to provide high levels of aid.

But LAFCO commissioners, in pondering East Palo Alto's frustrations for many years, should exhibit enough confidence in that community's leadership and its self-rule potential to order another vote on incorporation. And without any special-district hitches to confuse the main issue.