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# East P.A.'s struggle worries homeowners

By Ruthann Richter  
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Members of the United Homeowners of East Palo Alto picknicked under the magnolias Saturday, munching on barbecued ribs, dancing to Michael Jackson tunes and trying to recruit new members for their group.

Though the atmosphere was festive, it masked continuing frustrations the homeowners have with their community.

Ever since the group's formation about two years ago, members have been hoping to see improvements in town — less crime, cleaner streets, more businesses and more development in general.

But, they say, things haven't changed at all.

"Nothing has changed. In fact, I think some things have gotten worse," said Katye McCall, chairwoman of the 140-member group.

McCall said it irks her to walk down Frontage Road and have to toss garbage out of the way so she can pass.

She said the city spent about \$300,000 to clean up some of the trash, but that people keep bringing more in.

McCall also said she feels less safe in her home than she has in

the past.

"We are being robbed to death in our community. We need help from our police department," she said. "I think the police are doing the best they can ... We just don't get the service we need. (The department) just isn't large enough."

Gertrude Wilks, a former city councilwoman who lost her seat earlier this year, said she believes crime has reached a pinnacle in the city.

At the picnic Saturday, Wilks described seeing a burglar enter her home, having her husband's valuable carpentry tools stolen and having a private school she runs broken into two nights in a row.

"I think crime is in a crisis condition in this community," she said. "We want to surface it. We want to talk about it and talk about it a whole lot. I won't accept it as a way of life."

The homeowners also are worried about the city's finances and how it might affect their own pocketbooks.

Since East Palo Alto's incorporation in 1983, the city has been getting a subsidy from its former benefactor, San Mateo County.

But with subsidies tapering off,

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the city must find new sources of revenue.

A new fee schedule that could raise the rates homeowners would pay for improvements is being discussed. One proposal, for instance, would boost the fee for roof permits from \$30 to \$300, City Councilman Warnell Coates said.

"I know from where I sit that they'll come to the homeowners to raise money," Wilks said. "I'm concerned with it."

McCall and Pat Johnson, another member of the group, say new businesses aren't coming to town to help boost tax revenue and that few new developments are going up.

"You see building going on everywhere, but nothing going on here," McCall said.

Two local residents, Victor Perez and C.R. Price, said they are planning the first new local development to take shape in years.

Perez said Saturday that the partners plan a 40-unit complex of duplexes and single-family homes on five acres along Weeks Street.

While the partners say they are willing to bet on the city's future, others say they become depressed as they see friends and neighbors leave.

"The complexion of the community is changing," Johnson said. "A lot of your solid black homeowners are moving out. It's like a flight. The diehards like me stay on."

The homeowners say they hope to work together for improvements.

Some of the fruits of their efforts already are visible at a community garden they planted earlier this summer.



Bente Galle, treasurer of United Homeowners of East Palo Alto, hands out a frankfurter Saturday at the group's picnic.

Times Tribune staff photo by Kenneth K. Lam