

Cityhood for East Palo Alto

LAST December, when the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted to put incorporation of East Palo Alto on this April's ballot, we questioned the wisdom of EPA's bid for independence — on economic grounds.

Our doubts about whether the mostly residential community has a sufficient tax base — or even the potential for attracting an industrial tax base that could become sufficient to support a separate city — have not gone away.

At best, the incorporation campaign is an economic gamble. A lot of existing California cities are in economic trouble; this is not the most optimistic time to try to start a new city from scratch.

But, as we noted before, there are two economic feasibility studies, one by SRI International, the other by the Berkeley consulting firm of Angus McDonald Associates, which indicate that incorporation could work — maybe.

More economically viable would be annexation to neighboring Menlo Park. But Menlo Park shows no desire to annex East Palo Alto. Despite the similarity of names, there's even

less chance of annexation by the city of Palo Alto, which is not even in the same county.

The hard fact is, East Palo Alto is a stepchild community, 70 percent black, 15 percent Hispanic, largely low income. Surrounded by the affluence of Peninsula cities, it has all the classic problems of a depressed area.

Except in spirit, Leaders of the incorporation drive have shown such determination, and such hope, and such hard work in registering voters, that on second look we find their bid for local control compelling reason to recommend a vote for incorporation on April 13.

The fact is, they want to run their own community. And to do that, they need to become a city, not an unincorporated area dependent for its municipal services on the San Mateo County supervisors and various special districts. We still think that in some ways the financing of those services will be riskier if East Palo Alto goes it alone. The quality of street repair and sewage service and police protection may or may not improve. But the community will at least be free to make its own decisions, and if mistakes are made, they will be East Palo Alto's own mistakes.

Somehow that counts, in our value scheme, in a way that cannot be measured in dollars alone.

**April
elections**