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East Palo Alto's goal: to be its own boss

Is a SM County report biased on incorporation?

By Phyllis Brown
 Times Tribune staff

A citizens group working for incorporation in East Palo Alto has blasted a San Mateo County study as "heavily biased against incorporation and for annexation to Menlo Park."

The group calls for a "substantially improved and balanced analysis" of the issue.

The East Palo Alto Citizens Committee on Incorporation (EPACCI), in its formal response to the study completed in August by the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), complains the agency has presented a "worst case" analysis of the incorporation alternative and a "best case" analysis of the annexation alternatives.

East Palo Alto is a two-and-a-half-square-mile unincorporated area of San Mateo County east of Bayshore Freeway. It has a predominantly black, Hispanic and Asian population of about 17,500.

The incorporation committee was established by the East Palo Alto Municipal Council in January, and functions independently of the council. It is working to incorporate by November of 1981.

The LAFCO study, the group says, "is judged to be inadequate, incomplete and of questionable objectivity."

Committee members said they believe LAFCO staff is opposed to the formation of any new cities in San Mateo County. They feel an unbiased firm should have been hired to prepare the study.

The LAFCO draft environmental impact report seeks to determine which of East Palo Alto's alternative futures is most viable, economically and environmentally.

It identifies four alternatives: to remain an unincorporated area of San Mateo County; to incorporate as a new and separate city; or to be annexed completely or in part to Menlo Park or to Palo Alto.

The latter alternative is not significantly addressed in the LAFCO report because "the San Mateo County LAFCO has no legal authority" over a city in Santa Clara County, the study says.

Remaining unincorporated would be a "definite disadvantage," because "the problems of East Palo Alto would continue to be ignored," the LAFCO study says.

The committee says LAFCO has ignored the test case of Belle Haven, a predominantly black, Hispanic and Asian community incorporated with Menlo Park several years ago.

The lower level of services provided to that community shows that annexation probably will not mean positive change, the group contends.

"Menlo Park's Belle Haven, a community which hardly reflects an improvement in public services over what the county now provides to East Palo Alto," presents a contradiction, the group alleges.

Nor would annexation diminish the areas's isolation from other local communities as the LAFCO study also says.

Park's Belle Haven is isolated...geographically, ethnically, socially and culturally.

"One could reasonably conclude that East Palo

McCloskey: The only way for attaining self-respect

By Phyllis Brown
 Times Tribune staff

Incorporation as a city is "the only possible manner in which East Palo Alto can have a decent standard of living and any self-respect," Rep. Paul M. "Pete" McCloskey, R-Menlo Park, said Saturday in Palo Alto.

"I do not want to leave office with it on my conscience that East Palo Alto is not incorporated," said McCloskey.

McCloskey's term expires in two years, after which, he said, he will not run for Congress. Some observers believe, however, that he will run for the U.S. Senate.

To support the community's current incorporation efforts, he has proposed establishing a committee of federal, state and local legislators and officials.

"I don't know what year would be best. It would seem to be eminently feasible in five years, but the sooner the better," he said.

McCloskey spoke Saturday at a luncheon given by the East Palo Alto Citizens Committee on Incorporation (EPACCI). The group, established by the East Palo Alto Municipal Council in January, is working to incorporate the community by November of 1981.

Also attending were state Sen. Marz Garcia, state Assemblyman Robert Naylor, San Mateo County Supervisor Arlen Gregorio and Byron Sher, candidate for the state Assembly.

East Palo Alto has a primarily black, Hispanic and Asian population of about 17,500.

Attempts to incorporate the community in the past have failed, largely because of a shortage in tax revenues.

A recent study by the Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) said the area would fall about \$866,000 in the red over a four-year period if incorporated with its current tax base.

One way to solve that problem, McCloskey said, would be to attract "Silicon Valley-type industries" and automobile dealerships to sweeten the tax base.

"A city of that size can not incorporate with just small retail industries, and compete with the Stanford Shopping Center," he said.

McCloskey noted that the area has had little success in attracting industry because of its high crime rate. Some 40 percent of crime in San Mateo County takes place in East Palo Alto, according to Sheriff's Lt. Ken Frank, commander of the East Palo Alto substation. (The area is currently patrolled by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department.)

"No businesses would settle in that area, unless it has good police protection," he said.



Staff photo by Joe Melena
 Pete McCloskey

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"And East Palo Alto won't have that, unless the police force is local, lives there and cares about the community," he said.

He added that electronics firms would be less of a police burden because they provide much of their own security.

He expressed frustration that federal funds meant to aid communities such as East Palo Alto don't reach the people who need them.

"We have 10 percent unemployment in Fair Oaks, and 12 percent in East Palo Alto, but federal public works fund went to the county, not to East Palo Alto," he said. "I have seen money intended for East Palo Alto frustrated by the county government," he said, "because you can't guarantee that money sent to the county will get to East Palo Alto."

McCloskey also said that there should be a high school in East Palo Alto.

"It has always puzzled me why we bus kids from East Palo Alto to Carlmont High School, and close schools in Palo Alto. This is not a question of land use, but a question of people," he said.

East Palo Alto's only high school, Ravenswood, was closed in 1976 because of declining enrollment.

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Alto, if annexed to Menlo Park, would be just as isolated," the EPACCI response says.

The group takes issue with LAFCO's emphasis on East Palo Alto as a solution to the jobs-housing imbalance on the Peninsula.

"To consider East Palo Alto as the solution to the

jobs/housing imbalance problem is short-sighted. Such a complex issue will require collaborative planning on a county-wide basis," it says.

"In essence," it continues, "the draft EIR distorts the positive effect of recent (housing) development in East Palo Alto, and its impact on jobs, housing, infrastructure, environment and the general quality of life.

"The report grossly overstates the potential negative impacts of incorporation and grossly understates the negative impacts of annexation," the committee response says.