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Another group enters the debate, this one against incorporation

By Phyllis Brown
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EAST PALO ALTO — Add another name and acronym, and with it another political group, to the list of groups touting or contesting incorporation of this community.

The newly formed Concerned Citizens for Responsible Incorporation (CCRI) Monday distributed flyers urging East Palo Altans to vote against incorporation in the April election. The flyer warns that property owners' taxes will go up if incorporation succeeds.

"Beware: Your taxes will go up, your services will go down. Vote no on incorporation," the leaflet says.

That makes two groups for, three groups against.

The other four are the East Palo Alto Citizens Committee for Incorporation (EPACCI), the West of Bayshore Renters and Homeowners Association (WBRHA), the Menlo Park Annexation Committee (MPAC) and West Area Residential Property Owners (WARPO).

Among the new group's members are East Palo Altans Evelyn Wallace and Onieda "Mother" Branch, according to East Palo Alto Municipal Councilwoman Gertrude Wilks.

Branch is the director of the East Palo Alto Community Service Center, which donates food and clothing to the poor.

Neither Branch nor Wallace was available for comment Tuesday.

Wilks would not say whether or not she is a member of the group.

"I don't think I have to answer that at this time. I would rather handle it this way: Mrs. Branch is the chairperson and Evelyn is the co-chairperson. I don't want it to look like I am the only person doing this," she said.

Wilks said in fact that there are two

separate groups, one headed by Branch and one headed by Wallace, working together against incorporation.

Wilks made her opinion on incorporation known in a joint Municipal Council-EPACCI meeting last week.

A community leader for at least two decades, she is the founder and director of the Gertrude Wilks Academy, formerly the Nairobi Day Schools.

In an interview last week, Wilks told the Times Tribune that she doubts the economic viability of incorporation.

"I don't think it (incorporation) can stand as it is right now. I think we need to look at the alternatives," Wilks said.

She said however, that she does not necessarily feel East Palo Alto should be annexed to Menlo Park.

Wilks said the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission and Board of Supervisors might have approved incorporation "to get us off their backs. Let's just say I am not surprised at the move, I am not surprised at all."

Barbara Mouton, an East Palo Alto Municipal Council member and incorporation proponent, said the flyer's statement that incorporation will bring tax increases is untrue.

"It is a lie. The taxes will not go up. The only way that the taxes can go up (after Proposition 13) is if two-thirds of the people vote for a tax increase," Mouton said.

The flyer also asserts that services to East Palo Altans will be decreased if incorporation occurs. Mouton said East Palo Alto services couldn't possibly be any worse.

"You know there isn't any recreation for our kids, now. You know what state the sanitary district is in. They have asked the West Bay Sanitary District to take them over. So how could our service levels go down?" Mouton asked.