

Students lobby for EPA cityhood

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Students, alumni and a potential professor here are involved on both sides of East Palo Alto's incorporation question, which may be answered June 7 when residents vote for or against cityhood.

As many as 20 students here have been "involved on a daily basis" helping educate East Palo Alto people about incorporation, according to Keith Archuleta, a business student and the program coordinator of Tresidder Union. Omowale Satterwhite, the president of the Community Development Institute, a primary group working for incorporation, is a Stanford graduate. And former Rep. Paul "Pete" McCloskey, who may be approved by the ASSU Senate as a guest professor here this spring, was hired by a group of landowners who oppose incorporation two weeks ago.

At least eight of the 20-25 members of the East Palo Alto Citizens Committee for Incorporation (EPACCI), a group which meets weekly to plan the cityhood battle, are related to the University in some way. The Black Student Union (BSU), the Native American Indian Organization, the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atlan, the Stanford Progressive Alliance, the Chicano Graduate Student Organization, the Asian Student Association and the African Student Association all have endorsed incorporation, according to Pete Escobedo, organizer of the Concerned Student Coalition.

The San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) two weeks ago cleared the way for the cityhood vote this June. It also said last week that the ballot for the vote will only contain one measure, incorporation. The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors is expected to approve the ballot constraints at a hearing later this month, according to Ruben Abrica, a member of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council.

The most recent incorporation vote, which took place last April, aroused controversy because four measures appeared on the ballot and many voters confused the measures. Incorporation lost by only 41 votes.

Students involved in the incorporation struggle are trying to make sure that incorporation is not rejected in the June vote. Besides offering members for EPACCI, the student groups are canvassing the community providing information and trying to raise money for incorporation. The students have also started a massive voter registration drive which has been "very successful," according to Escobedo.

The area which is now East Palo Alto ranks 13th in San Mateo County in the percentage of registered voters, up from 19th in April 1981, according to Escobedo.

"This is largely the result of students spending two or three hours on Saturdays at supermarkets registering voters," Escobedo said.

Escobedo was also involved in a movement to get the ASSU to approve Satterwhite as a guest professor here. Satterwhite, who received a doctorate in education from the University, would have taught a course called "Community Development Workshop," which would have educated students on East Palo Alto's incorporation battle.

The Guest Professorship Bureau refused to propose the course to the ASSU Senate, according to Escobedo, because it was "too political."

A group of Stanford students who live in East Palo Alto and favor incorporation have started a group called the East Palo Alto Information Committee. The committee is attempting to search out students who live in the area and encourage them to vote for incorporation. There are approximately 350 University students living in the area, according to Satterwhite.

Stanford students have been involved in East Palo Alto's attempts to become a separate entity since the late-1960s, according to Archuleta. And blacks and Chicanos from the East Palo Alto area, along with the BSU, were instrumental in bringing about substantial changes in the University's policies toward minority hiring and student recruitment after Martin Luther King's death in 1968.

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The struggle for incorporation has aroused student concern for a variety of reasons, Archuleta said.

"If it were a white community nobody would ask why East Palo Alto should incorporate," he said. "It's a basic question of self-determination. People there can't even control their own area. San Mateo County runs the area. They (people in East Palo Alto) put in many resources which they don't get back."

McCloskey is representing a number of landowners who live in the mostly-white area of East Palo Alto west of the Bayshore freeway. The landowners fear that their community will suffer if East Palo Alto incorporates.

Council member Ruben Abrica, who is in favor of incorporation, also pointed out that three reports by San Mateo County officials have said that the area is sound enough fiscally to incorporate.

"They (opponents to incorporation) have never pinpointed where there isn't enough money to incorporate," Abrica said.



Keith Archuleta