

Opponents challenge EPA cityhood

By LISA LYNCH

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East Palo Alto is a city — at least for the moment.

Although it has been incorporated since the June 7 election, its enemies are still hoping to declare the election a fraud, and its skeptics are predicting a rocky road for a city with big problems and little money.

The election that incorporated East Palo Alto last June also gave birth to a lawsuit that, though overruled, is still pending. Several local realtors, notably Arn Cenadella, and an anti-incorporationist member of the EPA city council, Gertrude Wilks, charge that the election was invalid because of voter fraud.

According to former Rep. Paul "Pete" McCloskey, who

represents the anti-incorporationists, the circumstances surrounding the collection of absentee ballots were more than a little unusual. Many absentee ballots were filled out by pro-incorporationists John Goodwill and James Blakey, though with the consent of the voter; and many of the ballots were hand-delivered both to and from the home of the voter by Blakey and Goodwill.

"What happened here is that these people went around and registered a lot of voters just before the election, which is perfectly legal," McCloskey said. "It isn't very hard to do — you take a pad with about 50 spaces and everyone writes down their name and address."

After registering voters, Mc-

Closkey explained, the pro-incorporationists noted the names of those who applied for absentee ballots, waited eight days, and then reappeared at the homes of those voters to "collect" ballots. In several cases the ballots were both picked up and delivered to the homes of voters; court evidence includes seventeen cases where Goodwill put his own address instead of the voter's address on the paper.

"Now, it is perfectly legal for someone to show an absentee ballot to a friend or relative, and even have them fill it out according to the voter's wishes," McCloskey said. "But when a complete stranger comes into your home and says 'here's a ballot,'

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and they obviously want you to vote a different way, that's a different story. That seems a bit like coercion."

Despite the objections, the court found no evidence of fraud or coercion in the June election and awarded East Palo Alto official incorporation status on Sept. 23. A five-member city council was officially appointed: Omowale Sat-

terwhite, Ruben Abrica, James Blakey, and the anti-incorporationist Gertrude Wilks.

Barbara Mouton, who had been acting as mayor during the election battle, was given the position and offices were set up in East Palo Alto.

The young government of the city is optimistic about East Palo Alto's future. "Of course we're going to make it," Abrica said, "We've survived a major lawsuit and we're on our way now." According to Abrica, the city has already

begun accomplishing things they had promised: a rent-freeze ordinance has been enacted, a rent task force has been formed and plans are being made to open the former Ravenswood High School for community use.

"Not only am I convinced that the city is going to survive," Abrica said, "I think it is going to prosper."

According to Mouton, there are no immediate threats to the future of the city. "We just survived a major lawsuit," Mouton said, and