

The East Palo Alto Progress

April 1983

Volume 1 Number 1

Over 100 Attend Local Breakfast

Community Leaders Back Cityhood

On Saturday, 12 March 1983, the East Palo Alto Organizations for Independent government (EPAOIG) hosted a community forum breakfast for over 100 community residents. In the group were many seniors and homeowners who had braved the pelting rain to hear about incorporation. By the time the breakfast ended, the group enthusiastically voiced incorporation support, and pledged to work to ensure its success.

James Blakey, Chairman of the EPA Chamber of Commerce, headed the breakfast committee. Ed Becks skillfully emceed the three hour event. Rev. James Lucher gave the invoca-

tion and Rev. Henry Milton, Chairman of the Peninsula Ministerial Alliance, gave the benediction. There were several attendees involved with area churches: Rev. Green, Rev. Williams, Imam Ben Ahmad, and Mother Oneida Branch.

The theme permeating the talks by the seven program presenters and five panelists was "Incorporation is an idea whose time has come NOW!"

Several of the speakers discussed the beneficial aspects of incorporation. Some commented on the scare tactics used by the opposition.

Mrs. Oakes, Convenor of EPACCI, spoke about the incorporation strug-

gle and what benefits will accrue to residents of a new city. She also stated that many seniors call about a multiplicity of problems. "Seniors are in a very vulnerable position. Twice in the last six months their Social Security and/or Supplemental Security Income checks came up missing; some seniors had to wait several weeks for replacement checks. Since these checks are their only means of support, you can imagine the needless suffering and anxiety this caused," she said. "When the new city comes into being on July 1, 1983," Oakes stated, "one of the advisory committees to be set up must be a Commission on Seniors."

Dr. F. Omowale Satterwhite, Chairman of the San Mateo Planning Commission, spoke on the economic implications of cityhood.

Charles Price, Chairman of EPAOIG, talked about the organization, its objectives, etc., and urged all organizations to get aboard. This coalition of organizations meets every Thursday evening at 7:00 in the Municipal Council Building.

Joseph Goodwill, a real estate broker, cautioned people about the blatant untruth that high taxes were responsible for recent foreclosures in the community. He said the foreclosures were the result of the inability of some people to resist a sales pitch by "smooth talking" salesmen. People were talked into signing contracts to renovate their homes—putting siding on the outside, replacing appliances, and remodeling kitchens and bathrooms—and then consolidating whatever other outstanding bills they had under the same contract. People realized too late that they were not able to pay the resultant high monthly installments and soon found themselves in financial difficulties. He said that if we were a city, it would be easy to eradicate situations like this. You don't read of this happening in nearby cities.

Bill Powell, an active member of EPACT, cited the example of Alviso as to what happens to a community if it is not able to make decisions on its own behalf. Alviso is a stepchild of San Jose; therefore, the elected officials in San Jose were really not concerned about it. They did not take steps to ensure that the levees and dikes surrounding that community were kept in good repair or were the height necessary to prevent the resultant disaster. Now the residents of Alviso have been wiped out. If they had been an incorporated city, they could have been better able to make decisions about their community and protect themselves!

Responding to the rumor that people on fixed incomes would be disadvantaged when the city incorporates, Rev. Milton said, "That's nonsense." He stated that he really understands the term "fixed income." "I used to work for 25 cents a day," he said. "Your income can't be more fixed than that!" He said he was very much in support of incorporation and owned property in the community.

The next community forum breakfast is tentatively scheduled for April 9. More details on this soon.

Responsible Journalism: Open and Receptive

The failure of the established press to intelligently address our community's social, economic, and political life has been harmful to our advancement. There is a definite need in East Palo Alto for a "community newspaper."

In the months ahead, this newspaper will bring insightful and critical articles about our community to you. We will strive to create a public form of communication—an open forum—that will reflect the concerns, needs, aspirations, and achievements of the community. In order to do this, the newspaper's editorial policy must be open and receptive to citizens' contributions.

Our conception of a community newspaper embraces the fundamental idea that it deal with issues of importance and concern to citizens of East Palo Alto. If you wish to write something for the paper, please contact us. Whether we be old or young, Black, White, Brown, Yellow, or Red, homeowners or tenants, long time residents or recently arrived, we are all members of this community and have a right to have our voices heard. Thus, for a paper to fulfill its responsibility, it must be community operated and operated for the community.

We intend to be informative, critical, questioning, and above all, open in our editorial policy. Accessibility and accountability, we feel, are the keys to making this a community newspaper. Both are integral parts of our operation. Join us and ensure that the news is really the NEWS for us.

East Palo Alto: A Pawn of Others' Plans

Every community has problems. Some are economic in nature, others are social or political. In order to address these problems and concerns effectively, the ability to deal with them on a local level is imperative.

In the case of East Palo Alto, this ability to deal directly with community issues is presently limited. Because East Palo Alto is unincorporated, the County Board of Supervisors ultimately determines what needs should be addressed and how best to address them. The municipal council does not make the final decisions.

In recent months East Palo Alto has faced a number of pressing issues that need local solutions. However, our political status has kept us from providing them.

Being unincorporated, in fact, has weakened the community for decades. The example of Hiller Helicopter is an illustrative case. In 1949, this company established its headquarters on what is now Menlo Park land along Willow Road, then within East Palo Alto.

By 1950, Hiller had become the nation's largest producer of helicopters, supplying East Palo Alto with

important tax revenues. Eight years later the land was annexed to Menlo Park. East Palo Alto watched powerlessly as this tax revenue was stolen.

This legacy of vulnerability continues today; for example two of the most pressing issues currently facing East Palo Alto involve the proposed construction of the Dumbarton Distribution Center and the extension of University Avenue to the new Dumbarton Bridge. Both projects will greatly increase the traffic on University Avenue as well as bring more noise and air pollution to the community.

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Low-cost Legal Services Planned

East Palo Alto may soon have a non-profit law office serving low income clients in the area. If all goes as planned, the East Palo Alto Community Law Project will commence serving the area in September.

Two years ago, seven law students first approached the Stanford Law School administration about setting up a student-run law office in East Palo Alto. Their reasons included the critical need for legal services in a community of 20,000 served by only 2 attorneys, as well as the students' desire to combine practice and theory in a clinical experience.

Although San Mateo Legal Services theoretically provides for the legal needs of East Palo Alto's indigent residents, in practice the connection between the office and the community has been tenuous at best. There are two reasons for this; the office is not located in the community, and it is sorely underfunded.

The services the project will provide are limited to civil matters such as social service benefits, welfare benefits, domestic conflicts, wage claim disputes, job discrimination suits, etc. With some supervision, these concerns can be handled quite competently by second year law students. Thus it seems only reasonable that

law students be called upon to contribute their knowledge and skills to a neighboring community very much in need of them.

The project will have three components: The legal office staffed by students under the supervision of at least one full time attorney will provide direct services to clients; a weekly seminar will refine students' legal skills; the Community Outreach and Education Committee will organize periodic community meetings and educational seminars, thus providing a mechanism through which East Palo Altans can directly influence the philosophy of the Project as well as dictate the types of services provided.

Both student and community response has been encouraging. However, funding has been the only real problem. The project must raise its own funds. But students are optimistic that the money can be raised and the office opened by September.

The Law Project has planned two community seminars between now and September dealing with legal issues of pertinence to the residents of East Palo Alto. The seminars will be conducted by members of the Law Project and will be open to anyone wishing to attend. For more information contact Sandra Ortiz at 328-4363.

Property Tax Refund

If the Court decision is not upheld upon appeal, no refunds will be paid. However, if the decision is upheld, only those claims filed on time will be paid.

A handwritten or typed copy of the following form, returned to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, will be sufficient notification of a taxpayer's claim. The parcel number of your residence may be obtained from your tax Bill Information Card on the upper left hand corner.

A recent Northern California Superior Court decision, if upheld, will result in a reduction of California real property tax bills. The amount of the reduction would be approximately \$57 for each \$1000 of property tax paid.

The statute of limitations for filing tax refund claims for the first half of the 1978-79 fiscal year expires April 10, 1983. If you have owned your home since 1975, you may file a refund claim.

Board of Supervisors
San Mateo County
County Government Center
401 Marshall Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

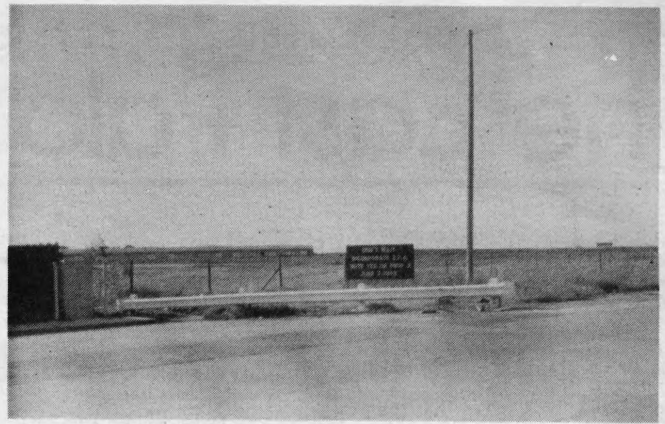
Dear Madam/Sir:

This is a claim for refund filed pursuant to Cal. Rev. and Tax Code #5097 with respect to taxes levied on Assessor's Parcel No. _____ located at _____

for the tax years 1978-1979 and each year thereafter. This claim is made on the basis that the taxes were levied and collected on unlawful assessments as set forth in *Armstrong v. County of San Mateo*, Civil No. 233408, San Mateo Superior Court (1982). We request that all taxes levied on the unlawful portion of the assessments in each of these tax years be refunded.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true.

Claimant
Mailing address of claimant



With little power to determine its future, unincorporated East Palo Alto will soon have a major project built along its border. The Dumbarton Distribution Center, to be built behind the neighborhood of Flood Park, will severely disrupt the surrounding neighborhoods.

Community Coalition Organizes For A Change

Seldom does a community have a second opportunity to pull itself out of the doldrums of despair, indifference, and political apathy, and strive

for a new image. The bright California sun, the ready hellos, the pleasant smiles, and the false liberalism have blinded us to the extent that we had readily accepted the status quo.

PROBLEMS

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The Distribution Center, which is to be built directly adjacent to the neighborhoods of Flood Park Estates and University Village on land that once belonged to East Palo Alto, is by far the most harmful of the two projects. Primarily a light industrial complex, it will also house warehouses that will necessitate the entrance of large diesel trucks. Moreover, the possibility exists that hazardous chemicals might be stored in the complex, since usage under the "light industrial" designation will not be determined until the resident companies finalize their contracts.

The increased presence of air pollutants, higher noise levels, and increased traffic in the area will have a negative effect on the surrounding neighborhood's quality of life. The learning abilities of children at the nearby schools of Costano Elementary and Ravenswood Middle School will also be affected because of the project's presence.

Both the Distribution Center and the University Avenue extension were approved by agencies outside of East Palo Alto. In neither case did the municipal council play a significant role in planning or advising the projects. The minor advisory role played by the municipal council in both instances demonstrates the lack of power East Palo Alto has to determine what actually goes on in the community.

Another example of East Palo Alto's ineffectual political situation is apparent in the proposed sale of the Ravenswood High School site. The 28 acre parcel belongs to the Sequoia High School District but is located within East Palo Alto.

In the event that the land were sold,

Recently a new group, the East Palo Alto Organizations for Independent Government, has emerged in East Palo Alto. This is a coalition of organizations consisting of the following: the East Palo Alto Senior Citizens Club, League of Dedicated Citizens and Registered Voters of East Palo Alto, Ravenswood Recreation and Park District, East Palo Alto Citizens Committee on Incorporation, East Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, Drew Medical and Dental Center, NAACP, American Muslim Mission, Ravenswood Little League, East Palo Alto Council of Tenants, Edna Foundation, Comite Latino de East Palo Alto, West of Bayshore Homeowners and Renters Association, Bilingual Parents Committee, and the Whiskey Gulch Gang.

This modest but positive group of citizens, combining its strength through the use of that rare ingredient called people power, has quietly organized to improve all facets of life in our community. Realizing that all ethnic races can live in harmony here, and also truly understanding that the power structure's game is to divide and conquer, this coalition of citizens has organized for the purpose of improving the quality of life here.

Plainly, we are the victims of economic and political exploitation. When the hand comes down, it comes down on all of us. Accordingly, the East Palo Alto Organizations for Independent Government is putting together a program that speaks to every interest—social, political, and economic—and to every age group.

Be a part! Help lay the ground work for a new city. The coalition of groups meets every Thursday in the Municipal Council Building at 7:00 p.m. See you!

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Incorporation Means Local Control

Webster defines incorporation as "the act of blending together to make something whole." In legal terms, incorporation means the formation of a city—the act of blending the different parts of a community into a workable unit, or establishing one unit of government that is efficient, responsive, and accountable to the people. In East Palo Alto, incorporation is an idea whose time has come.

Incorporation will mean that the San Mateo Board of Supervisors no longer makes decisions on how to spend our tax dollars. A new City Council will have this authority and responsibility.

Incorporation will mean the elimination of the EPA Municipal Council which runs our community on a budget of \$220,000; our new City Council will manage a budget of close to \$3,000,000 each year.

Incorporation will mean that the County Sheriff's Department no longer provides police services in East Palo Alto. Our new city will have its own police department which gives first priority to reducing crime, protecting seniors, and securing our neighborhoods.

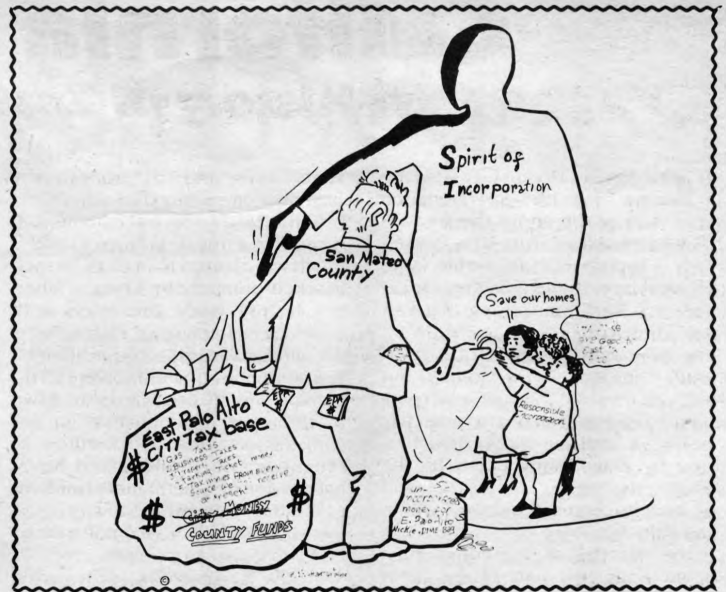
Incorporation will mean that the County Planning Department is no longer responsible for community planning and land-use decisions. Our new city will have its own community development department with responsibility for planning, zoning, and enforcement.

Incorporation will also mean better social services for seniors and youth; a viable community recreation program; and the beautification of our community.

Why should East Palo Alto continue to be run by a Board which admits that a City Council would do a better job? Why should East Palo Alto continue to have a Municipal Council with little money and no authority, when we can elect a City Council that has the authority and resources to change things in our community? Why should East Palo Alto continue to complain about how the County spends our tax dollars when we can have the responsibility for making these decisions ourselves? Why should East Palo Alto continue to have poor police, planning, recreation, and social services when we have the opportunity to correct these problems through incorporation?

Mrs. Carmeleit Oakes, Convenor of EPACCI, has said, "Those who oppose incorporation want the responsibilities of a child and the privileges of an adult." She is absolutely right! Councilwoman Barbara Mouton has said, "Incorporation is bargaining from a position of strength rather than begging from a position of weakness." She is also right! Councilman Ruben Abrica has said, "Those who oppose incorporation appeal to people's fears, and those who support incorporation appeal to people's sense of responsibility." He is right, too.

Get informed! Get involved! And then speak for yourself on June 7th at the polls.



Buyers Beware

Recently, a rash of consumer fraud cases has been reported in East Palo Alto. The cases involve alleged licensed contractors who prey on the elderly and on unknowing residents, offering to insulate or side their homes or perform other residential upgrading services.

In many instances these services are not as urgently needed as contractors indicate. The charges for these services are also above the average market price. Consumers should beware.

If you are approached by someone selling services to upgrade your home, do not allow yourself to be pressured into signing a contract immediately. Shop around and see if the price quoted by the agent is competitive with other firms in the area.

It is always a good idea to seek legal advice about the contract you are going to sign. Elderly and low income persons may qualify for free legal assistance with San Mateo Legal Aid. If you are currently experiencing a problem of this nature, contact them at 365-8411. But the best advice is to seek legal assistance before the situation turns into a problem.

Renters: Know Your Rights

Some renters in East Palo Alto have decent, safe, and healthy apartments and homes. However, several landlords are taking their rent money and running.

This winter a number of residents are living without heat. Many homes and apartments have roofs which leak like sieves. Many parking areas do not have lighting. Residents, especially women, are afraid to use their own cars in the evening. Windows are out, and door frames are not sealed against the cold and wet winter nights. Kitchens and bathrooms are infested with mice and roaches. Plumbing leaks and the stench of algae and mold force renters to use their neighbors' facilities.

California state law mandates that renters must have habitable conditions in which to live. If damages to an apartment or home are not caused by the renter, then the renter has the right, when the landlord will not take care of the problem, to withhold rent. The renter may also demand that the landlord make the necessary repairs, or repair the damage himself and deduct the costs from the next month's rent.

The landlord's minimum obligations include that:

- 1) the housing unit have no leaks when it rains and no broken doors or windows;
- 2) the plumbing must work, including hot and cold water, and there must be a working sewer or septic tank connection;
- 3) the heater must work and be safe;
- 4) the lights and wiring must also work and be safe;
- 5) floors, stairways and railings have to be in good repair;
- 6) when the unit is rented, it must be clean, with no piles of trash and no rats, mice, roaches, or other pests;
- 7) the landlord must provide enough bins with covers for the garbage.

The East Palo Alto Council of Tenants (EPACT) is presently confronting these and other landlord problems.

The East Palo Alto Council of Tenants (EPACT) is presently confronting these and other landlord problems. EPACT has assisted groups of renters from different complexes. Among its accomplishments is the notification of health authorities for the investigation of violations of state law and the subsequent issuance of citations against the owners.

If you are a renter and need assistance, call EPACT at 326-0985 or 323-0884 or write EPACT, P.O. Box 51503, East Palo Alto, CA 94303.



Problems

Continued from page 2

there would be no guarantee that any of it would remain for public use. Optimally, the entire 28 acres would be set aside for use by East Palo Alto residents. However, the present political status of the area does not allow for a solution that would lead to that end.

The solution to these and similar problems arising in the future may defy easy solution. But the incorporation of East Palo Alto would certainly transform an ineffective municipal council into a city council empowered to make changes in the community and deal with its problems.

With the knowledge that as a city, the ability to effect change within city boundaries is a reality, priorities can be established and addressed systematically. But of even greater importance, East Palo Alto will have the flexibility and creativity to meet future challenges and improve the quality of community life.

The East Palo Alto Progress

A non-profit monthly community newspaper serving East Palo Alto, California. Persons interested in contributing articles, photography, or poetry may do so by submitting them to **The East Palo Alto Progress**.

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California Dream City

A History of East Palo Alto (part 1)

"California's Dream City" was the title of a 1905 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about the area we now know as East Palo Alto. Blessed with a superb climate, fertile land, physical beauty and a bayfront location, it is hardly surprising that East Palo Alto, dating back to the 1850s, has the longest history of any community in San Mateo County. But through much of this past it lacked a stable population and a strong civic identity. Consequently, it was victimized by neighboring cities, by the county, the high school district, and by certain powerful interests within East Palo Alto.

The plunder of the community, however, is only part of the story. Over the past 25 years an increasingly permanent and cohesive population has fought to control the institutions which shape community life, a fight that is reaching a major watershed in the current effort to incorporate East Palo Alto. By retracing our development, by learning from the past, we can also learn something about the kind of future we want to create. So to this past we now turn.

Although the East Palo Alto area was an exquisite site for a town, the title of the 1905 *Chronicle* article contained irony. The actual settlement there had fallen upon hard times and only one inhabitant remained. The original townsite had been known as the Port of Ravenswood. Located in the proximity of Cooley's Landing, it was meant to be a center for shipping goods to San Francisco. The building of a rival port in Redwood City, however, and the completion of a railroad from San Jose to San Francisco, left it

superfluous, and the promise of a bustling community died.

In the 1870's a revival commenced when five acres of William Cooley's ranch were leased for a brick factory. Worked primarily by Chinese labor, the factory made the bricks with which San Francisco's Palace Hotel was built. After this accomplishment, few contracts, apparently, were forthcoming and the brickyard shut down in 1883. The town once again was stillborn, leaving two families of ranchers, the Cooleys and Kavanaughs, the only permanent residents of the area. The lone inhabitant of the townsite in 1905 was employed by PG&E to guard its pipeline.

In 1907 Ravenswood again started anew when the Woodland Place subdivision, located in the general vicinity of the present downtown area, went up for sale. Nine years later, the establishment of Runnymede Little Farms Colony, between Runnymede and Cooley streets, signaled a rapid increase in population. Sixty families had settled by 1917 and the colony had 1,200 residents by 1922.

Runnymede was one of many utopian schemes in California founded on the belief that rural life was superior, that small plots of land intensively farmed could produce the necessities of life, as well as the serenity that can only come from independent labor. This was hardly a utopia for the poor, however, since plots of land, ranging from 1 to 5 acres, had to be purchased in cash and in advance. A 1917 advertisement said the plots were "especially adapted to people of means who wish a pretty setting for a garden home."



Tensions between the colonists and residents of the Ravenswood subdivision developed in the early 1920s and came to a head in 1925 when an election to determine the name of the entire community was held. In a 504 to 321 vote, the former group, which chose "East Palo Alto," won over supporters of "Ravenswood."

The elections, however, did nothing to unite the community. Separate chambers of commerce survived until the late 1930s and throughout this period the *Palo Alto City Directory* recognized distinct municipalities. Indeed, the East Palo Alto Progressive Club's slogan, "Unity in the Community," was a bit of wishful thinking.

Given the sectional antagonisms, a 1935 discussion about the need to incorporate in order to control an epidemic of liquor stores came to nothing. Also, in the 1930s, the colony, which had been devoted to poultry raising, started to decline due to the Depression and increased competition.

By the early 1940s, neither chamber of commerce existed and much of the poultry colony was being divided into housing tracts. This decade witnessed another incarnation of East Palo Alto in which the population skyrocketed, especially after the war, but the community institutions necessary to conduct serious urban planning were lacking.

Even had there been greater continuity in population and leadership, the historic organizations, devoted mostly to rural pedestrian concerns like gopher and ground squirrel extermination, and according to a *Palo Alto Times* article, to the "eradication of poison oak, thistles, and other obnoxious weeds," had little of value to impart about the preservation and development of urban wealth.

From the late 40s to the late 50s this failure to manage urban wealth, particularly taking the form of repeated failures to incorporate, resulted in the stripping away of huge sections of valuable land. In the late 1940s, East Palo Alto extended to Embarcadero Road in the south, Middlefield Road in the west, and to the Atherton boundary and even a bit of the Redwood City border on the north. By the early 1960s, it had been reduced to the two and one half square miles it currently occupies.

In the next installment of this article, we shall take up a discussion of this dismemberment, of the arrival of the Black population and consequent development of a stable community, and of an ever-growing struggle for self-determination over the last two decades.

The Time Is Now

East Palo Alto will again face the choice of whether or not to become a city in June. At no time in its history have the prospects for success been better than they are now.

The reasons for becoming a city are as compelling as they are numerous. Citizens of the area will, for the first time, have direct control over zoning and other land use questions. They will be able to control where funds are spent and will have more leverage in getting those funds from state, local, and federal sources. Local elected officials will have to be more accountable to the residents.

As things now stand, East Palo Alto is just a small corner of the constituency known as San Mateo County. East Palo Alto has to compete county-wide for services. It must compete against cities—organized city governments. An unincorporated entity stands little chance against such odds. Incorporation will bring focus to a community that has long been under-represented. Incorporation will bring power.

It is for this reason that some oppose

the eventual incorporation of East Palo Alto as a city. Large landowners now have a free rein to build and use property as they see fit. By becoming familiar with a distant, less interested, less sympathetic layer of government, they can lobby quite successfully against the wishes and best interests of those living in the neighborhoods themselves. Relationships between those who wish to use the land and those who are now able to grant that use will be drastically altered. The power to grant those uses will change hands when East Palo Alto becomes a city.

A city government controls its own money. A city government hires and maintains. A city government proposes and disposes. A city government makes plans and takes care of its own business. The funds East Palo Alto now receives are filtered through the fingers of a selected few. The people have little or no say in where their funds will go. The selected few gained their status through connections with the county. The power to allocate those funds will change hands when

East Palo Alto becomes a city.

The municipal council has long been strapped by its advisory status. The board of supervisors calls the tune as it stands now. When East Palo Alto becomes a city, the council will gain the power to make decisions. The council will be accountable to the people of East Palo Alto.

In the final analysis, those who stand in opposition to incorporation stand in opposition to the community's exercise of its rights. The opponents of incorporation would keep the status quo where the majority of East Palo Alto citizens are powerless. They would like to maintain the present situation wherein the peoples' legitimate concerns are diluted and, ultimately, shunted aside all the way up the line from the county seat to the state capitol to congress. Some of the incorporation's opponents say it's "too much, too soon" and others say it's "too little, too late." We must answer them by saying "cityhood is for us . . . NOW." The alternative is to remain powerless which is no alternative at all.