



Inland News

Cityhood coming into view

SOUTHWEST COUNTY: Quests in Menifee Valley and Wildomar weigh heavily on fiscal viability.

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By **SEAN NEALON** and **JESSICA ZISKO**
The Press-Enterprise

Two Southwest Riverside County communities seeking to become cities are moving forward.

In the Menifee Valley, cityhood leaders signed a contract earlier this month to complete a fiscal analysis of its ability to survive as a city. They hope to see a cityhood vote in summer 2008.

In Wildomar, cityhood leaders expect their fiscal study to be complete within a month and hope for a vote in November.

The progress comes four months after Gov. Schwarzenegger signed legislation that will make it easier for areas to incorporate.

The legislation restores funding for a limited time from California's vehicle license fee that was reduced after voters approved a state-ballot measure in 2004. In Menifee Valley, cityhood leaders said the fees could bring in an estimated \$5 million a year.

Menifee Valley

The proposed city of Menifee Valley would cover 42 square miles and encompass three unincorporated areas: Menifee, Sun City and Quail Valley.

About 60,000 people live in the area, said Joe Daugherty, who was named chairman of the Menifee Valley Incorporation Committee earlier this month.

The committee is an offshoot of the Menifee Valley Community Economic Development Council, the official group spearheading the drive.

The committee signed a \$35,000-contract with Rancho Santa Margarita-based GST Consulting, the same company preparing Wildomar's fiscal study, Daugherty said.

The committee hopes their recommendation differs from that of a March 2005 fiscal study prepared by Berkeley-based Economic and Planning Service. That study concluded there isn't enough commercial growth in the Menifee area to provide the tax money needed to support a city.

The new Menifee Valley study is expected by July 1, Daugherty said.

If the study shows the area could sustain itself as a city, cityhood proponents plan environmental and mapping studies, Daugherty said.

Daugherty said he hopes to have the cityhood question on the ballot during the summer of 2008. That would be a year ahead of the July 1, 2009, expiration of the vehicle license-fee restoration bill.

Cityhood leaders now are focusing on fundraising. They have money committed to pay for the \$35,000 fiscal study but need an estimated \$100,000 more for future studies, Daugherty said.

They expect to raise at least \$30,000 during a black-tie casino night hosted by Riverside County Supervisor Jeff Stone on March 8, Daugherty said.

Wildomar

Within the next month, a fiscal analysis of the Wildomar area's financial viability as a city will be forwarded to the Local Agency Formation Commission, the state agency that oversees proposals to create new cities, proponent Sheryl Ade said.

The analysis should be favorable now that vehicle license fees have been restored for new cities. With the fees, a 2004 economic report said Wildomar would run a \$542,000 deficit its first year but generate a budget surplus in four years.

LAFCO will decide whether Wildomar should incorporate. A vote for residents could be scheduled for November, and, if successful, Wildomar could be a city Jan. 1, 2008.

About 26,000 people live in the community.

Cityhood proponents have raised nearly \$100,000 to pay for economic studies, lobbyists, application fees and publicity.

Reach Sean Nealon at 951-375-3730 or snealon@PE.com

Reach Jessica Zisko at 951-375-3731 or jzisko@PE.com