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Wildomar applies for cityhood

By: LAURA MITCHELL - Staff Writer

WILDOMAR ---- An application to make Wildomar a city was officially filed this week, but officials say the community has an uphill battle ahead.

County Executive Officer Larry Parrish and a representative from the group pushing for incorporation signed and delivered the application Thursday to the Local Agency Formation Commission, the panel that will decide if residents will be given the chance to vote on the question.

Wildomar is a 119-year old semi-rural, but rapidly growing, community of about 27,000 people straddling Interstate 15 between Murrieta and Lake Elsinore.

The pro-incorporation group, Wildomar Incorporation Now, hopes the commission can make a decision this spring or summer and that the community can vote in November, group President Bob Cashman said Friday.

But getting cityhood approval is very difficult across the state, commission Executive Officer George Spiliotis said Friday. There has not been an incorporation in Riverside County since a change in state law was enacted in the early 1990s, Spiliotis said.

When a city incorporates, it gets property, sales and hotel occupancy taxes that used to go to the county. The law in question essentially says cityhood should not come at the expense of a county, as most tended to before the law was changed, he said.

At the same time, a community must be able to show it has enough of a tax base to be

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economically viable as a city, Spiliotis said. Sometimes the commission will work out an agreement with a new city where it reimburses the county for lost revenue, he said.

But that can create another drain on the young city, Spiliotis said. It's possible for a community hoping for cityhood to be economically viable but if it would have to reimburse the county \$1 million a year, it may no longer be viable, he said.

Those numbers for Wildomar will be available once the incorporation group completes a comprehensive fiscal analysis, which will be the heart of the application, but does not need to be filed up front, Spiliotis said.

County Supervisor Bob Buster, who represents Wildomar, said Friday the county will not stand in the way of Wildomar cityhood even if the county loses some money at the outset.

"Community self-determination is extremely important," Buster said.

Wildomar's opportunity for self-determination could depend more on Sacramento than the county, however. A 2004 budget law eliminated a key source of income for new cities, by making them ineligible to receive vehicle license fee money.

Without that money, Wildomar would not be economically viable as a city, according to a preliminary study on the community's economic outlook, completed in October 2004. The study, by Temecula-based consultants MuniFinancial, also showed that Wildomar would not have had a problem becoming a city if the law hadn't changed.

The incorporation group, along with groups in other communities that are trying to incorporate, are supporting legislation by Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, that would restore, at least partially, the vehicle license fee revenue that new cities had relied on for seed money for their first seven years. Assembly Bill 1602 is scheduled to be heard in January.

Buster said there is no guarantee that the money will be restored.

"I don't want to throw cold water on this effort ---- it's extremely important ---- but a note of realism should be injected, too," he said. "We don't want to send a city off into cityhood if they can't cover their costs."

But members of the cityhood group said they are confident Wildomar will be able to incorporate.

The incorporation group has already hired a consultant, Rosenow Spevacek Group of Santa Ana, to do the comprehensive fiscal analysis, group member Sheryl Ade said Friday. The group is also raising money to cover the costs of the analysis and other documents needed for the application, Ade said. The comprehensive analysis can cost as much as \$100,000,

The group meets at 10 a.m. Jan. 14 at the Wildomar Senior Center, 32325 S. Pasadena St. For more information call (909) 330-0355.

Contact staff writer Laura Mitchell at (951) 676-4315, Ext. 2621, or lmitchell@californian.com.

Comments On This Story

Gerard wrote on December 26, 2005 10:14 PM:"Cityhood for Wildomar is a terrible idea. Taxes will surely increase and standard of living here will surely decrease. Never forget, you cannot have a ghetto without first having a city."

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