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Riverside County to consider helping Wildomar staff a second fire station

By: BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer

WILDOMAR -- Riverside County may offer to help pay for staffing at a second fire station in Wildomar, potentially offsetting an anticipated expense that some had feared could scuttle chances of this community becoming a city.

The idea, proposed by county Supervisor Bob Buster, will be considered by the county Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, which could vote to direct county staff members to negotiate a cost-sharing arrangement with a future city of Wildomar. Buster's district includes Wildomar.

Last month, representatives of the Riverside County Fire Department wrote that Wildomar would need a second fire station by July 2008 to maintain an acceptable response time in the face of the anticipated growth in Wildomar in the coming years.

The cost to build that station wouldn't be an issue for Wildomar, as it would be funded by developer fees, county officials said. But staffing it likely would pose a problem for a young city, said George Spiliotis, the executive director of the Local Agency Formation Commission, in a recent interview. The annual



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staffing expense of a second fire station, possibly on Clinton Keith Road, is estimated at \$1.3 million, officials said.

A financial analyst for Wildomar Incorporation Now, the local organization leading the bid, had found the community had enough local revenues to support itself as a city -- but that was before the county fire department issued its findings.

Cityhood advocates argued last month that the fire station would be needed regardless of whether Wildomar became a city, so the expense would be entirely on the county if officials denied the bid.

"The county would have to put this up 100 percent," said Sheryl Ade, a member of Wildomar Incorporation Now.

That argument apparently won over county officials, who met with members of the organization over the last month.

"If this keeps them from incorporating, the county would have to pick up the full cost," said Dave Stahovich, Buster's chief of staff. "If they can incorporate, then in the long term the county will save money on services."

Ade, who had said she doubted the need for a second fire station would derail her organization's campaign, is pleased that the matter could be settled before the Local Agency Formation Commission contemplates the viability of the Wildomar bid. That could happen late next month.

"I think the county was very cooperative," she said. "They see the benefit of it for them. And it benefits our residents."

In an interview Friday, Spiliotis said he wasn't sure quite yet whether sharing the expense of a second fire station in Wildomar would ease the efforts for the incorporation bid.

The Board of Supervisors are scheduled to meet at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday at 4080 Lemon St., Riverside.

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