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Last modified Friday, May 18, 2007 10:15 PM PDT

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Incorporation bid challenged

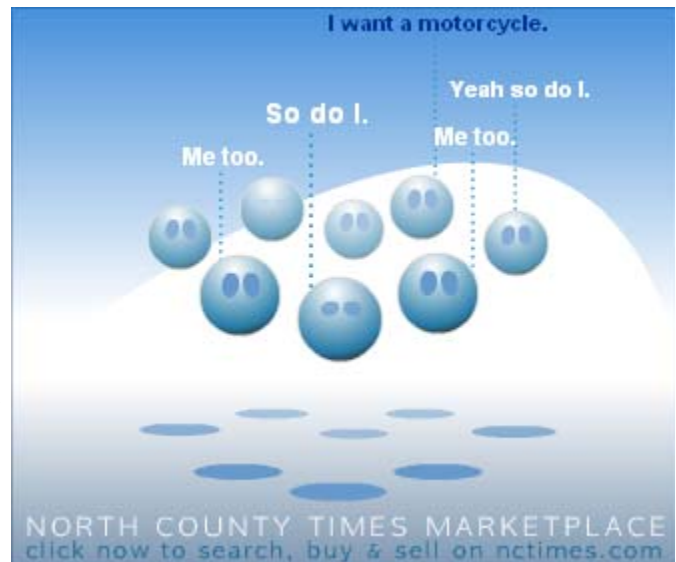
By: *BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer*

WILDOMAR -- A Wildomar man's challenge will keep residents from voting on whether the community can become a city in November, pushing back the earliest possible incorporation date to July 1, 2008.

Cityhood advocates had hoped to put the question on the ballot in November, paving the way for incorporation Jan. 1. To make the November ballot, proponents needed the approval of the Local Agency Formation Commission by the end of the month. But that won't happen, said George Spiliotis, executive director of the commission, which analyzes such efforts.

On Monday, Wildomar resident Gerard Ste. Marie sent a letter to the state controller's office asking for a review of the financial analysis conducted by a consultant for cityhood proponents. That office received the request Wednesday night, and will complete a review within 45 days, a state spokesman said.

Ste. Marie is challenging the assertion of financial consultant Gary Thompson that Wildomar could sustain itself as a city if the county defrays some of the operation costs of a second fire station within the 24-square-mile



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community.

An earlier financial analysis by Thompson found Wildomar would have net gains in each of its first several years of operation as a city. But in mid-March, the county Fire Department noted that the community likely would need a second fire station by July 2008, along Clinton Keith Road.

The station could be built with developer fees, but it's unlikely Wildomar could afford the operation costs. That prompted the county Board of Supervisors in April to direct county officials to negotiate a cost-sharing plan for that fire station -- when Wildomar incorporates.

In a letter to the state controller's office, Ste. Marie asked that officials determine whether it is acceptable "for a county to offset municipal service costs to a proposed city by interjecting public finances in order to salvage an otherwise infeasible incorporation proposal."

Ste. Marie paid \$25,000 for the review. He did not return phone calls seeking comment Friday.

In August 2004, Ste. Marie sued the county for attempting to sell 80 acres of parkland off Clinton Keith to Mt. San Jacinto College. Last summer, a Riverside Superior Court judge agreed with Ste. Marie's contention that the deal required the majority approval of Wildomar voters or action by state legislators.

Leaders of Wildomar's incorporation bid had heard whispers that a challenge to their financial analysis could be filed, but were surprised it actually transpired.

"We never thought (Ste. Marie) would plunk down that money," Wildomar resident Sheryl Ade said.

Until the state controller's office completes its review, LAFCO can't take any action on the cityhood bid, Spiliotis said.

"Just the fact that the request was made does change the date (of the commission's consideration)," he said. "It's a major, major change in the process."

If the commission ultimately approves Wildomar's cityhood bid, then the application would go before the county Board of Supervisors. If the supervisors endorse it, then the cityhood question would come before voters.

Bob Cashman, chairman of Wildomar Incorporation Now, the local group leading the cityhood campaign, said his organization views Ste. Marie's filing as a delaying tactic. But organizers of the group are not worried that it could permanently derail their cityhood campaign.

"It's sort of unfair, but we're proceeding," Cashman said. "We'll make it happen."

Ade is equally confident.

"We will still incorporate," she said. "It'll just be a little later than we had planned."

The commission now is scheduled to consider the Wildomar bid at its July 26 meeting.

-- Contact staff writer Brian Eckhouse at (951) 676-4315, Ext. 2626, or beckhouse@californian.com.

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Comments On This Story

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Fred wrote on May 19, 2007 9:02 AM:

" What a different a year makes. A little more time is not going to hurt anyone but only make sure Cityhood is the right thing to do. The first CFA that cost \$50,000 did not find the community viable. Now the second CFA says cityhood is good to go with the help of Bob Buster and friends. It looks like it is a good idea to have a different pair of eyes to see what the truth is and get to the bottom of what is going on. "

Wes wrote on May 19, 2007 1:03 PM:

" Let's see. Mr. Ste. Marie, you've effectively squashed efforts to construct a college campus here. Now you'd like to squash cityhood. You campaigned to have voters decide related to the college issue. Yet now you want the State Controller to influence the decision soon to be made by LAFCO. Seems to me you'll do whatever is necessary to have it YOUR way - not the will of the people's. A question for you, where did the \$25,000 come from? To Fred: To the contrary. If delayed much longer the decision will be taken completely out of the residents hands. The economic reality will be that the reinstated Vehicle License Fees will not be available to fledgling cities. You will be able to kiss local control good bye, and your opportunity to vote on which direction you would like to see your community head will be lost. Whose best interest will your County Supervisor have in mind? Whose has he had? Think about it. "

Thank you Ste. Marie wrote on May 19, 2007 3:25 PM:

" I don't know Ste. Marie's intentions, but in my opinion Wildomar should never be a city. It would be in the best economic interest for the whole community if the south end was annexed by Murrieta. People need to realize that things would only get better. The school district would not change. We would just have better services and better maintained roads that Murrieta would invest in. The county doesn't care about Wildomar, and Wildomar can't afford to pay for anything on its own. "

Know your facts wrote on May 19, 2007 4:19 PM:

" Both earlier posts have inaccurate information. 1st, the difference between the two Fiscal analysis reports had nothing to do with "help from Bob Buster" it had everything to do with the reinstatement of the Vehicle License Fees at the state level. This assists all new potential cities in becoming fiscally viable - even the 1st CFA report indicated this! 2nd, Murrieta will not be annexing any of Wildomar. They dropped their land grab attempt, and now have their hands full with a revenue shortfall. And, by the way, Ste. Marie probably wouldn't support a Murrieta annexation anyway because that would mean an increase in taxes - something he is on record for being against. The only way to get away from county control without an increase in our taxes is to become our own city. "

Way To Go wrote on May 20, 2007 9:47 AM:

" Ste Marie effectively squashed the effort to construct a college campus in Wildomar, arguing that the deal should have been put to the voters. Now this challenge delays the effort to put before voters the attempt for cityhood. Delayed long enough, cityhood efforts will also be squashed. The sunset of Vehicle License Fees (VLF) for newly formed cities is not far off, and without them there will be no chance for new cities to be formed without major tax increases. He tries to have it both ways, arguing for what HE thinks is best for residents. Why shouldn't the residents decide this issue, Ste Marie? What's different about this issue that makes the voters unqualified to decide their own fate? Another question for you, Ste Marie, where did the \$25,000 come from? Just happened to

have it lying around and available? Really... Could it be that by delaying incorporation a developer associate could be allowed the time required to get their project approved and pushed through at the County level, knowing full well that the City of Wildomar would might not approve of it? Or would at least have control over it that perhaps they might not like? Everyone has an agenda. To Fred: Bob Buster did not reinstate VLF, that came down from the State legislature. You should also know that there is a large and growing contingent of Wildomar residents dissatisfied with many decisions and the general performance of Buster and his staff of late. The "bottom of the issue" is local representation and control that cityhood will achieve. Have you ever attempted to attend any meeting in downtown Riverside that would affect those of us here? It is not at all convenient. Do you really believe that representatives from outside of our area have our best interests in mind? Being governed as we are now by the Board Of Supervisors consisting of representatives from the far reaches of this huge County making decisions for those of us living here is no longer effective or worth our investment in them. They, the BOS must by design take into account their interpretation of what is best for all of their constituents. The County's population has increased enormously. Your voice in that system is rarely heard. A locally elected city council, and a city hall just blocks from it's residents puts that control and representation readily accessible, where it ought to be. We are all going to pay taxes anyway. I would like to know that my dollars will be used in the most beneficial manner within the local area that I choose to live in. Without cityhood, the community of Wildomar will eventually be gobbled up by either Lake Elsinore or Murrieta, and will lose it's identity and charm, and will probably be split in two between them eventually. It will also inherit their burdens; taxes and otherwise. No thanks. "

Consultant or Magician? wrote on May 20, 2007 9:24 PM:

" I read the first CFA and now I see why the Wildomar WIN group wanted to hide it away from public scrutiny. It's up on the LAFCO website on the back of Ste. Marie's letter:
http://www.lafco.org/opencms/resources_links/Wildomar/39_Request_for_SCO_Review.pdf It shows Wildomar could not afford to be its own city, even with the new Vehicle License Fees. Then along comes GST Consulting, and with a little smoke and mirrors, presto, cityhood is ready for a vote. I think this GST Consulting fellow would make a good snake oil salesman, and could probably do well as a televangelist too. It looks like he's already fooled the Menifee incorporation group to buy into his magically appearing cityhood act as well. "

Imprimus wrote on May 22, 2007 11:48 AM:

" LAFCO should have ask for a demur on Ste. Marie's request to the State Controller. St. Marie's request is frivolous. "

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