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### County board to consider helping new cities

By: BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer

With the cost of staffing new fire stations the biggest stumbling blocks to Menifee Valley and Wildomar cityhood efforts, county leaders are considering helping defray those costs for 10 years.

Under a proposal by county Supervisors Bob Buster and Jeff Stone, the county would give each community the amount of money it expects to save by having them become cities. In Wildomar's case, those savings are projected to be \$238,000 to \$310,000 annually; in Menifee Valley, the savings could range anywhere from \$330,000 to \$1.58 million a year, depending on which of several boundary options is chosen.

Those amounts would be reduced over time if sales tax revenues exceed what is anticipated in financial analyses of the two would-be cities. The Board of Supervisors will consider the proposal at its meeting Tuesday morning.

The board has already instructed county officials to negotiate a cost-sharing agreement for a proposed new fire station in Wildomar if and when the community incorporates. Cityhood proponents, however, have said that doesn't

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help their cause: Since Wildomar is not yet a city, officials have no one to reach a formal deal with; and without guaranteed dollars from the county, the community can't incorporate.

That prompted the newest plan proposed by Buster and Stone, some officials have said.

Critics of Wildomar Incorporation Now, the group leading the cityhood effort, have questioned the legality of a county offsetting municipal service costs to a new city. One critic, Wildomar resident Gerard Ste. Marie, paid \$25,000 to the state controller's office to review the legality. That agency backed the board.

But the controller's office did agree with one premise of Ste. Marie's argument: that it's inappropriate for a financial analysis to base a city's "viability upon unsecured, speculative revenues."

The proposal by Buster and Stone appears to remove that crucial hurdle. Buster's district includes Wildomar, while Stone represents Menifee Valley.

The assumption that both incorporations would save the county hundreds of thousands each year is held by several county officials, and backed up by the financial analyses prepared by each community's cityhood group. Wildomar cityhood critics have deemed the analysis biased and inaccurate.

Buster, however, noted that "several documents" concluded that incorporation would boost the county's net savings primarily because new cities get a windfall of vehicle-license fees from the state. One of those documents was an analysis in 2006, compiled by an independent consulting firm.

"It should eliminate any concern that the new city wouldn't be able to fund its own services," said Buster of his and Stone's proposal.

Even if Buster and Stone are unable to convince one of the three other board members to support their plan, Wildomar may be able to support itself, said Gary Thompson, the financial consultant for both communities' cityhood groups.

Since the state controller's review delayed Wildomar's incorporation by at least six months, to July 2008, the financial analysis now starts one fiscal year later, he said.

"So Wildomar picked up a lot of extra money," Thompson said. "Their model has greatly increased. From my perspective, they're definitely in a much better position fiscally."

Although Menifee Valley is behind Wildomar in the incorporation process, that bid appears to have less local resistance and possibly fewer financial hurdles. As of yet, no critics of Menifee's bid have publicly come forward.

"Menifee has a potential of having bigger boundaries and more assets," said Verne Lauritzen, Stone's chief of staff. "Wildomar is a little smaller."

Without a county contribution, a city of Menifee Valley wouldn't have financial difficulties until its 10th year ---- if that city's northern boundary would be Rouse Road in what is now Romoland, Thompson said.

That the county appears more than willing to relinquish control of Menifee and Wildomar didn't surprise Joe Daugherty, a Wildomar resident who is leading Menifee's bid.

"The county does regional services," said Daugherty, whose office is in Menifee Valley. "They're not in the business of providing urban services. Menifee now has 50,000 people. We can't be serviced by the county, anymore."

The Board of Supervisors will meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the County Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon Street in Riverside.

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**Wes wrote on Jul 28, 2007 1:51 PM:**

" Their should be no reason now for Mr. Spiliotis and his fellow LAFCO members to deny the residents of Wildomar the opportunity to decide their own direction. After all, we are a society founded and based upon majority rule of it's resident constituents. "

**To Wes-Law wrote on Jul 29, 2007 8:51 AM:**

" It is more like Mob rule... - Now you can say Wildomar will be on Welfare, how fitting. Since Wildomar was founded on 3 names. I think it would be appropriate to change the New City name from Wildomar to "MooreCashAde". Bridgette Moore, Bob Cashman, Sheryl Ade. "

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