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County board votes to help proposed cities

By: BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer

RIVERSIDE -- Wildomar's and Menifee Valley's bids for cityhood got big financial boosts from the county Tuesday.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously agreed to help defray the costs of operating new fire stations in the two communities -- if both cityhood-advocacy groups persuade a commission and voters to approve incorporation.

The board's decision appears to have addressed the lone financial stumbling block before both groups.

"This puts them over the top," said Supervisor Bob Buster.

Analyses of the communities had found that both would run into financial trouble at some point in their first 10 years if the county didn't contribute some funds to help staff new fire stations.

Those reports prompted supervisors Buster and Jeff Stone to propose that the county give the two communities the money the county expects to save by having them become cities.

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With Wildomar, the savings are projected at \$238,000 to \$310,000 annually, whereas in Menifee Valley, the savings could range anywhere from \$330,000 to \$1.5 million a year, depending on which boundary is chosen for that would-be city. Menifee Valley would include Menifee, Sun City, Quail Valley and possibly part of Romoland.

"Ultimately, it becomes ... the citizens who will decide whether Wildomar and Menifee become cities," Stone said. "We've laid the groundwork."

County officials said they believe that a county helping a fledgling city is unprecedented in California.

Under state law, a new city must cover all potential revenue losses a county would suffer by the incorporation, a concept called "revenue neutrality."

But with Wildomar and Menifee Valley, the agencies suffering would be the new cities, county leaders said. They believe the incorporation of both communities would financially benefit the county in the long run, hence the supervisors' rationale for approving Buster's and Stone's plan Tuesday.

Buster said the plan is "very creative, but very logical and very fair."

"When (voters) have an opportunity to make a choice about cityhood, they won't have to worry about the city paying its own way," he said.

The reason a community can afford to incorporate without hurting the county is that for the first five years the state gives new cities vehicle-license fees amounting to about \$50 per person.

Not all Wildomar residents are convinced, however. No opponents of Wildomar's cityhood group were at Tuesday's hearing, but several recently have said they distrust the financial analysis by that group's consultant, Gary Thompson, alleging that it's biased and inaccurate.

Only three speakers voiced their opinions Tuesday -- two spoke in favor of Wildomar's incorporation while one supported cityhood for Menifee Valley.

Sheryl Ade, a leader of Wildomar Incorporation Now, said Tuesday's decision should end all questions about the financial viability of Wildomar as a city.

Thompson, who observed the hearing from the audience, said it's premature to predict whether the question of cityhood in each municipality would appear on ballots next year. The bids first need to be scrutinized by the county Local Agency Formation Commission and the board.

"I would never say it's a breeze," Thompson said. "But ... from a financial standpoint, they've (cleared) a huge hurdle."

Joe Daugherty, the president of the Menifee Valley cityhood group, said Tuesday's decision was "pretty clear cut." But he added: "You never know what lurks ahead."

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***Weekend is just
around the corner...***

Comments On This Story

Note: Comments reflect the views of readers and not necessarily those of the North County Times or its staff.

Does this really make sense? wrote on Jul 31, 2007 10:08 PM:

" By becoming an Incorporated City a community is making the statement that it can take care of itself. This deal makes a mockery of true governmental independence. If a new city can't pay for basic services (yes, a Fire Dept. is basic services) then don't become a city where people actually expect you to do something. And the plan to provide services? These new cities plan on contracting back with the County for all governmental services. Does any of this make sense to you? It does if you are one of these ego maniac pro-city folks who will finally get their 15 minutes of fame as a hack city councilmember. Supervisor Buster's pandering knows no bounds. His lack of true leadership over the years has clearly put this district behind in logical development and economic strength. I'm counting the days until he's out on the street. "

Whine, whine wrote on Aug 1, 2007 12:37 AM:

" got any cheese for your whine? "

Beware wrote on Aug 1, 2007 1:18 AM:

" Wake up to reality Wildomar, you are being had...big time. Don't believe all the half-truths and misinformation in the WIN cityhood proposal. Don't be fooled by the WIN and County propaganda the press is feeding you. The proposal doesn't provide for the expansion or improvement in services which most of us want or need...without raising your taxes. Ask the tough questions and get the real answers before this whole thing comes back to bite you in your pocketbook. Find out what restrictions and obligations are attached to the VLF monies and the County funds. You won't like the answers! Ask yourselves why the County is pushing so hard to get rid of Wildomar. You've got to understand why they are pushing cityhood so hard. "

Reardon wrote on Aug 1, 2007 3:28 AM:

" The history of incorporation is that communities incorporate to get local control, then find that they have traded a far away government that knows them not for a local government that does things to them under the guise of doing things for them. Local control is wanted primarily to stop or delay development, but then the local government finds that as the responsibility for local services increases, it is necessary to approve local development, so they must approve a six-story candy-striped massage parlor to get sufficient fees to build a new "City Hall" and hire police, and fire. The new city is right back approving the development they tried to stop, because local bureaucrats, police, and fire take a continuing stream of money. That means new development, an industrial park, fees, taxes...there is no free lunch! "

Grham wrote on Aug 1, 2007 6:34 AM:

" All of you stop and think.. 1st just a few of the many people want to gain control. The county has no control it allows builders the ability to build anything anywhere. The elected officials answer to the people not the other way around. I say get in the game.. What type of city and services do you want... We the people have to make the difference. how about 11 houses per acer. or how about one house per half acre. large homes large lots well planned with buffers between types of developments. green spaces... horse trails..It's are call!!! I am ready are all of you?? "

No restrictions wrote on Aug 1, 2007 8:09 AM:

" Beware, There are no restrictions attached to either the VLF money nor the county money. It is all general fund discretionary money that can be spent on any service. If you don't like this answer, then I suggest you go read the law. "

To all wrote on Aug 1, 2007 8:30 AM:

" Bob Buster and other County officials have done the Wildomar community at large a great disservice! They have blatantly interfered with the whole LAFCO process and may render it completely meaningless. Who knows what political pressures are being exerted on this group to approve a vote for Wildomar cityhood? It's a sure thing that the residents of Wildomar need to investigate these issues and find out for themselves who is in bed with whom? If the case for Wildomar cityhood is so fragile that it requires all these extraordinary measures and 'special' funding, then it is too fragile for us to seriously consider. "

Reardon wrote on Aug 1, 2007 9:18 AM:

" Grham: Make your own decision -- but understand that there is a cost to local control. The euphoria wears off quickly -- the costs go on FOREVER! (Been there, done that!) "

Observer wrote on Aug 1, 2007 9:56 AM:

" You cityhood detractors are a joke. You can't make your case logically, so you conclude everything is a conspiracy. "

Just Say No wrote on Aug 1, 2007 10:55 AM:

" Let me get this straight. Buster wants to get Wildomar out of his hair so bad he is willing to give away County money and then call it "Reverse Revenue Neutrality". This guy is slick, no wonder he calls it "very creative". He has got this WIN crowd so drunk off of Power and Money that they are screaming local control. By the way, who is it that has the local control? Like the WIN crowd is going to listen to you when you speak at the City Council meetings. "

Once again wrote on Aug 1, 2007 2:03 PM:

" I'll try this again, as the Californian didn't post the first copy. Sheryl Ade wants to run Wildomar and everyone in it so badly she will say just about anything. We are so sick of her and the other WIN proponents declaring victory for their cause at every juncture with these broad, artificial statements. The question of financial viability has certainly not been answered satisfactorily. Does Sheryl think the people of Wildomar are such fools? You can add to the financial questions exactly who is slated to profit from cityhood? Clearly Sheryl and the other WIN members who have declared their candidacy for city council, and maybe some of the County officials who have abdicated their roles and responsibilities and thrown aside their obligations to support a neutral LAFCO process which should protect Wildomar residents from this fiasco. "

Wes wrote on Aug 1, 2007 6:14 PM:

" As mentioned by another here, there are no restrictions on the VLF fees. They are being collected, and will be continue to be collected regardless of incorporation. Property taxes the same thing. That will not change. What will change is how each communities portions of that money will be allocated, and by whom. By a Supervisor attempting to appease his constituents over a broad area, or by locally elected, locally residing, people like you and me. Not career politicians serving their particular perceptions of what is best. That is the reality of it. I would prefer that it be the latter, thank you. Wouldn't you? "

Talk Gerard wrote on Aug 1, 2007 7:41 PM:

" When are you going to enlighten us as to why you spent your own \$25,000 on the SCO report? "

To Wes wrote on Aug 1, 2007 9:53 PM:

" The WIN members who have declared their candidacy for city council are not like me or the majority of Wildomar residents, and are well on their way to becoming "career politicians" who already serve only their own interests and perceptions. They've been taking their lessons from Bob Buster and appear to subscribe wholeheartedly to his methodology of deceit and subterfuge. In addition, many of them have repeatedly displayed an appalling lack of respect for any opinions, which differ from their own narrow point of view. Trading the devil you know for one you don't know is hardly progress. We need only look to our neighboring cities to the north and south of Wildomar to see that local control does not necessarily provide better government. They've had to deal with corruption, conflicts of interest, malfeasance and costly recall elections at the local level...diverting their community's time, energy and money away from the appropriate issues of government. If you think local control is

automatically going to be better, you are in for a big disappointment. "

Wes wrote on Aug 2, 2007 9:41 AM:

" To "To Wes": As I mentioned on a another blog on this site I am not expecting a perfect situation. I as well pointed out, as you have, the issues facing our neighboring communities. Those situations are ones that I would rather not become a part of by default - which is what will happen should incorporation not be achieved. You are correct, it won't necessarily provide better government. What incorporation will provide us with is the opportunity to do so, and for that we should all be willing to give it the effort. It all boils down to whether we like the way things are headed now, or would we like to grasp the opportunity to make it better? That opportunity is now. "

To Wes wrote on Aug 2, 2007 12:33 PM:

" When you say "WE" in [would we like to grasp the opportunity to make it better] you are talking about the New City Council members aren't you. If you think the community of Wildomar is going to convince any of the council members, that is wishful thinking. The WIN has already made up their minds on the issues before Wildomar. Trying to convince Sheryl Ade and her gavel of anything is like pulling teeth. "

Wes wrote on Aug 2, 2007 10:39 PM:

" "WE" as in all of us residents of Wildomar. "WE" are capable of deciding what is best for our community, and who would best represent us and our desires for it. The status quo (County Rule) no longer serves us as well as it should. "

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