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Director reverses opinion on Wildomar's cityhood

By: BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer

WILDOMAR ---- A city of Wildomar would be financially viable, the head of a regional commission concluded Thursday, reversing an opinion issued just three months ago.

George Spiliotis, executive director of the Local Agency Formation Commission, determined Wildomar would be able to raise enough funds to support itself in its first 10 years of operation.

Most cityhood leaders said they anticipated Spiliotis' support.

"I'm ecstatic," Bridgette Moore said. "It's great to hear it."

The commission, which considers cityhood and annexation bids, is scheduled to review the proposed Wildomar incorporation Thursday morning. If the commissioners and the county Board of Supervisors support Spiliotis' conclusion, the question of incorporation probably would be put before voters in February. It's unclear when the supervisors would take up the question.

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Spiliotis endorsed an analysis of Wildomar's finances that had found the prospective city would have enough funds to sustain the service levels provided by the county ---- which has directly governed the community ---- and have a reasonable reserve fund.

The financial report anticipates a flood of sales tax dollars from a proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter earlier in the proposed city's life. If the project is delayed, Spiliotis believes the would-be city could still remain afloat financially. It could open as soon as July, 2009.

Still, he cautioned in his report that leaders of the would-be city "exercise extreme prudence during the first few years of operations."

That analysis was completed by consultant Gary Thompson, hired by the group promoting cityhood, Wildomar Incorporation Now, but its methodology was shaped by Spiliotis and Thompson, Spiliotis said Thursday.

Critics of the cityhood bid have alleged that Thompson's analysis was overly optimistic, based on a biased methodology. Spiliotis, though, rejected that theory Thursday.

"The end product is unbiased," he said.

The cityhood commission was originally expected to consider the bid in May, but Spiliotis concluded the community would struggle financially if it incorporated, and recommended the commissioners oppose cityhood.

A resident's challenge of the financial analysis to a state agency prompted a three-month delay and in the interim Riverside County supervisors voted to contribute any money they would save as a result of cityhood to the new city ---- a projected \$238,000 to \$310,000 annually.

That additional money helped tip the scale in Wildomar's favor, leading Spiliotis to now recommend the commission back the cityhood effort.

"It did us a favor frankly," incorporation proponent Sheryl Ade said of the delay.

Resident Martha Bridges, one of the more outspoken critics of Wildomar Incorporation Now, declined to comment Thursday.

The Local Agency Formation Commission is scheduled to meet at 9:30 a.m. Thursday at the County Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside.

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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County of Riverside wrote on Aug 16, 2007 11:45 PM:

" Hey Wildomar, how can I help you incorporate faster? Can't wait until the locals control their own destiny. It's a lot harder than you think and nobody on WIN has a clue what it really takes to govern. We should start a pool to see which city council member first compromises their "strong" beliefs on remaining rural in character when you have to approve strip malls to pay the bills and keep the lights on. Good luck on your experiment. "

Thanks Gerard! wrote on Aug 17, 2007 2:07 AM:

" You are a supporter of Wildomar Cityhood after all! "

Walmart wrote on Aug 17, 2007 7:38 AM:

" A Cityhood built around a proposed Wal-Mart. We are surrounded by Wal-Marts on both sides. What makes you think they are going to close the stores in Lake Elsinore and Murrieta and build a Wal-Mart in Wildomar. Maybe they will keep all the stores open and we will have more Wal-Mart than Starbucks. "

Modern wrote on Aug 17, 2007 2:07 PM:

" This sounds a little fishy to me. "

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