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- Reader Services
- Trail
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- Community
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Regional commission: Wildomar voters to decide their own fate

By: BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer

RIVERSIDE ---- Whether Wildomar becomes a city is a question now in the hands of that community's voters.

Thursday, a commission that considers incorporation and boundary proposals voted unanimously, 6-0, to endorse a financial analysis that found Wildomar could support itself as a city. That decision essentially ensures the question of cityhood going before voters early next year.

"The decisions really are outside our hands," said county Supervisor Bob Buster, a member of that regional panel, the Local Agency Formation Commission. "They should be in (voters') hands."

In the next few weeks, the Board of Supervisors will set an election date, most likely the Feb. 5 presidential primary. If voters approve cityhood, Wildomar would formally incorporate July 1. It would be the first community in the county to incorporate since Murrieta in 1991.



Wildomar resident Martha Bridges holds up a map during a meeting of the Local Agency Formation Commission, which voted 6-0 today to endorse a financial analysis that says the rural community could support itself as a city and put the question of cityhood before Wildomar voters early next year.

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Securing the commission's approval was the biggest obstacle before Wildomar Incorporation Now, said the group's president Bob Cashman. It took 14 years.

The election won't be limited to the question of cityhood. Voters will also select from a slate of candidates to elect the city's first five-member city council. The three candidates who receive the most voters will earn four-year terms; the next two finishers will get two-year terms. The top vote-getter will be the community's first mayor.

But Cashman didn't dismiss the next challenge ---- convincing a majority of voters to support incorporation ---- as easy.

"It'll be a task for us," he said. "Not everyone knows what (cityhood) means."

At least 100 of the community of 22,000 know. They were present Thursday in Riverside.

A large contingent of Wildomar residents ---- most of whom are affiliated with Wildomar Incorporation Now ---- were bused to the County Administrative Center. All supporters affixed red, white and blue WIN pins to their clothes; some wore pro-cityhood shirts.

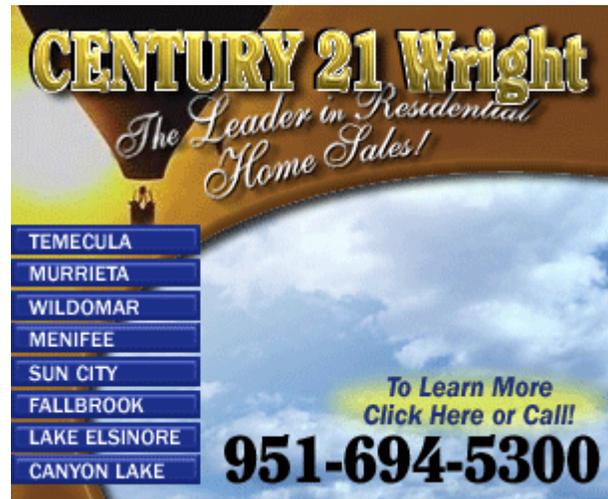
Had the Local Agency Formation Commission considered Wildomar's cityhood bid in May, as had been scheduled, it's quite possible ---- if not likely ---- the vote would have been reversed.

In March, the county Fire Department announced that the 22-square-mile community would need a second fire station, probably along Clinton Keith Road, within the next few years. While developer fees would pay for the construction of the station, the annual operating costs, it appeared, would put the would-be city in the red ---- a projection that would require the commission to reject the cityhood bid.

The Board of Supervisors promised to split the operating costs with the prospective city, but did not specify a yearly figure. So, the bid appeared stuck, if not stillborn.

A resident's challenge of the financial analysis, ironically, saved the bid, officials said. That analysis was completed by Gary Thompson, WIN's consultant.

Resident and cityhood critic Gerard Ste. Marie appealed the financial analysis to the state, alleging that it was improper for a county to subsidize a city. That challenge ---- which cost Ste. Marie \$25,000 ---- postponed the commission's consideration from May until Thursday.



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In the interim, the state ruled that a subsidy wasn't inappropriate, as Ste. Marie contended, and the Board of Supervisors voted to give a city of Wildomar the county's net savings from the community's incorporation over its first 10 years of operation. That's an average of \$250,000 annually, which appears to ensure Wildomar would have an annual savings, said George Spiliotis, the commission's executive director.

"Those ... significant changes have really changed the outlook," Spiliotis said.

Ste. Marie, who has refused or ignored all interview requests since he filed his challenge, told the commission the county's contribution "is an illegal gift of funds."

Thompson, in an interview, disputed that contention.

"There's intergovernmental transfers all the time," he said. "It's like the state giving cities money for (vehicle-license fees)."

Other critics, including Wildomar resident Martha Bridges, contended the financial analysis relies too heavily on a proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter for Interstate 15 and Bundy Canyon Road. A developer is pushing the project, but has yet to officially sign Wal-Mart to the parcel, county officials said.

"It seems to me we should stop talking about Wal-Mart until we have some concrete (promise) from Wal-Mart," Bridges said.

Spiliotis said Wildomar could survive a delay of the proposed Wal-Mart, but acknowledged the project would be "a very significant item in the commercial portfolio of the new city" ---- as much as \$500,000 amassed annually in sales tax revenue.

But a collapse of that project would not necessarily doom the prospective city, county officials and leaders believe.

If the project were to fall through, a city of Wildomar would "still be afloat," Thompson contended. He noted his analysis did not factor in grant money accrued by cities, and asserted the revenue projections in the report were purposely conservative.

Bridges, Ste. Marie and critic Steve Beutz asserted cityhood proponents had also failed to account for the downturn in the housing market ---- particularly in Wildomar.

"It's a bad idea at the worst possible time," Beutz said of cityhood.

Buster, however, believes enough revenue will be infused into prospective city's coffers ---- even if Wal-Mart doesn't move in to the 22-square-mile community.

"These locations along the freeway are huge," Buster said of vacant parcels along I-15.

Two of the commissioners, however, acknowledged doubts about the would-be city's financial viability if Wal-Mart doesn't move in ---- and especially in an uncertain economy.

But both ---- La Quinta City Councilwoman Terry Henderson and Hemet Councilwoman Robin Lowe ---- said they believe the question of cityhood should rest with the voters.

After the commissioners voted, Lowe turned to the 100-plus cityhood supporters, and said: "Your work is just beginning."

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

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Comments On This Story

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

Concerned-1 wrote on Aug 24, 2007 8:22 AM:

" Sometimes I wonder if there is any common sense out there at all. Wildomar becoming a city? No! Folks, there's no city there. It's a semi-rural, bedroom community, not a city. Here's the deal. If the decision on becoming a city hinges on whether or not a Walmart comes to town...well, figure you it out. "

Wildomar Resident wrote on Aug 24, 2007 12:03 PM:

" We need to vote to become a city. All those OC people moving out here wanting the same "city" options-they are the ones complaining. Wal-Mart will probably never come--We have one in L.E. and Murrieta--that store already have enough land to make it a superstore. I hope the vote makes us a city--we need to support ourselves for our own firestation, police dept. I'm voting YES. "

Better off wrote on Aug 24, 2007 1:15 PM:

" You are better off as a City where you can regulate yourselves; rather than the county regulating your land uses etc. Temecula would have been a MESS (and UGLY) if it were still a County. I thank goodness EVERY DAY that we incorporated..... the comparison of infrastructure as what was built by county vs. city is unbelievable. County doesn't care as much as the City so if you want to look run-down and ugly, stay a County. If you want to improve yourself, incorporate and find leaders who CARE... not ones that will half-a\$\$ approvals. Make it count. Upgrade yourself!! Or, stay a County and you'll just keep looking run-down. "

living in unincorporated Wildomar wrote on Aug 24, 2007 1:59 PM:

" The city of Murrieta tried last year to take a portion of Wildomar and our Supervisor Bob Buster said -- "all or nothing" -- they didn't want it all. Lake Elsinore has already annexed a portion of Wildomar this year. Change will happen -- it's just a matter of who is in control of the change. It's not about Wal-Mart, although I know a town that had a Wal-Mart in one shopping center and then lured the Super Wal-Mart as an anchor to the new shopping center across the street. Businesses change location, but the unincorporated town of Wildomar could disappear...register and vote wisely. "

Kathe wrote on Aug 24, 2007 5:24 PM:

" I think that Wildomar becoming a city would be wonderful. I attended the meeting as a pro-Wildomar city supporter. It was shown that Wal-Mart or no Wal-Mart, Wildomar has the funds necessary to sustain itself as a city. Don't make getting Wal-Mart the be all or end all in this battle! Wildomar is ready for this next step - vote YES! for cityhood! "

The Wizard of Oz wrote on Aug 24, 2007 5:24 PM:

" The city-hood will probably go through, but the million dollar question is.....contracted police with the Sheriffs'

Department, or your own police Department..... "

Glen Starks wrote on Aug 24, 2007 6:31 PM:

" I've never met so many naive, frightened people in my life. What are you afraid of. What are the personal financial, emotional or environmental problems facing the opponets of Wildomar becoming a city. WHERE'S YOUR PRIDE!!! "

Jon wrote on Aug 24, 2007 6:34 PM:

" To: "Concerned" Do you think Murrieta ad Temecula started out as cities? They were rural too! When I moved to Wildomar 15 years ago Murrieta had just incorporated and there was nothing on Cal Oaks except one grocery store and two gas stations! Wal-mart may or may not come to Wildomar but if they don't some other smart business will want that very valuable spot on I-15. To: "living in unincorporated Wildomar" I don't know where you've been but Murrieta dropped the annexation of any of Wildomar in Feb. of 2005. Both Murrieta and Lake Elsinore are now backing the cityhood effort and have no plans to annex any part of Wildomar. Now is the time fo Wildomar to become a city! "

To The Wizard wrote on Aug 24, 2007 6:55 PM:

" There is no question about law enforcement plans. The CFA and all the plans call for contracting with the Sheriff's Department for the same number of officers. Ditto for fire and code enforcement support. Don't look for an increase in staff, any substantial improvements or a switch to our own departments for years to come. If voters approve cityhood, they should understand that they are voting for "like for like" not an increase in services. It's one of our big concerns. "

Hey Glen wrote on Aug 24, 2007 6:57 PM:

" Pride goeth before a fall. Blind pride is no substitute for good judgement. "

Jon wrote on Aug 24, 2007 9:13 PM:

" If we want more police and fire services in Wildomar, we need to become a city so we can control our destiny. We have a better shot of more services if our votes are not part of all of the unincorporated areas of the county. If our votes are part of a city they will count more. "

To: To The Wizard wrote on Aug 24, 2007 9:55 PM:

" It is not "like for like" services! Right now the Sheriff's patrol all the unincorporated areas from Wildomar to Corona! When Wildomar contracts with the Sheriff's then the Sheriffs will patrol Wildomar and Wildomar only. That is the difference. Their contract will be to patrol the city of Wildomar so it will be DEDICATED services. There is a difference! This new dedicated service will be at no additional cost to the resident. Your taxes will not increase. You will receive more benefits at no additional cost. The time to become a city is NOW! Vote YES on Feb 5. "

To The Wizard wrote on Aug 25, 2007 5:37 AM:

" You will have the same number of law enforcement officers,if not the same officers themselves. Dedicated or not, common sense should tell everyone that you can only get so much out of one person no matter who they report to... Quit pretending that either the quality or quantity of these essential services will improvement with cityhood as proposed in the current CFA...unless voters are willing to approve increases in taxes. Anything else is a blatant misrepresentation of the facts to garner votes for cityhood. "

To Jon wrote on Aug 25, 2007 5:50 AM:

" If you want more police and fire services in Wildomar, you will have to pay for them. WIN's proposal for cityhood calls for the same number of officers we have now, and no budget for increasing those numbers. Surely the voters of Wildomar are smart enough to realize that you don't get "something for nothing"...no matter how many times certain people assure you that they can give that to you. Wake up to reality. Get the facts before you vote, not just the WIN campaign nonsense. There will be no free lunch served up with cityhood! "

Jon wrote on Aug 25, 2007 8:12 AM:

" To: "To Jon" Why don't you go by your name? If you're going to criticize others opinions you should id yourself. I never said we wouldn't have to pay more for more services--either through the county or as a city but if that's what the majority wants it's a lot easier to have a CSA passed for our city than to have to go along with the wishes of other unincorporated areas of the county. I don't expect to get "something for nothing" but I do expect that my

vote and wishes will count more in a city than they do in the county. Yes on cityhood! "

To Jon wrote on Aug 25, 2007 2:16 PM:

" You may recognize that more services require more expense, but most Wildomar residents do not. They are being foolish enough to allow WIN to misleading them. I, for one, don't want to pay more taxes. We are already paying enough to support more services if the waste and special interest expenditures were eliminated. You've decided to say "yes" before you have all the facts. The County of Riverside is planning to increase the ratio of law enforcement officers to 1.1 per one thousand residents. The current WIN CFA leaves us with the current and lower ratio. Think about that. "

living in unincorporated Wildomar wrote on Aug 25, 2007 4:00 PM:

" Jon appears to have all the answers??? Okay, I got the timeframe incorrect for Murrieta wanting part of Wildomar, but I believe that Bob Buster did say all or nothing and Murrieta didn't want all of Wildomar. So will Elsinore back out of the annexation off of Railroad Canyon in the northern section of wildomar that LAFCO approved earlier this year? Is there a pending lawsuit on that attempt at annexation? Please advise and use a friendlier tone neighbor :) "

Jon wrote on Aug 25, 2007 7:34 PM:

" To: "living in unincorporated Wildomar" Well, neighbor, you are big enough to admit that you had one of the facts wrong and I'm big enough to admit that I don't have all of the answers. I guess that makes us both human. "

Jon wrote on Aug 25, 2007 7:39 PM:

" To: "To Jon" Who wants the "free lunch" now? You want more police but you don't want taxes to go up. Taxes are a fact of life--they only go up! You get what you pay for. "

To All wrote on Aug 26, 2007 1:02 PM:

" Wildomar should not become a city. The pro incorporation team is either naive, power hungry, or lying. Probably all three. Wildomar has nothing to offer as a small city. Lake Elsinore should annex everything north of Baxter and Murrieta everything to the south. If this community wants to better itself that's the way to go. Sorry but Lake Elsinore is now a better town than Wildomar. Yes it has it's bad parts around Riverside Dr. but have you seen Tuscany Hills, Canyon Hills and new golf course community there building. I dont think Murrieta is perfect either but its still a nice city over all. Wildomar needs to get with it, but if you want it to be the future ghetto of the valley vote for incorporation. "

To all wrote on Aug 27, 2007 9:59 AM:

" One process has been completed, and another is just beginning. Let's hope that both sides of the issues will be heard and discussed, giving the voters of Wildomar the opportunity to examine the pros and cons and make an informed decision. Everyone should strive to be strictly honest and civil in their exchanges. Lets's also hope that everyone remembers we have to live together with eachother after the election, and remember to respect the right of everyone to their own opinions, values and viewpoints. "

Iori wrote on Sep 2, 2007 1:13 PM:

" Please, you mean to tell me this thing hinges on WALMART COMING TO OUR TOWN!!!! Is the developer the initial and primary force behind WIN??? We will forever be known as WALDOMART. Change happens, yes, but, WALDOMART??? No thankyou. "

Scott wrote on Sep 6, 2007 12:33 PM:

" I have lived in Wildomar four years. Personally I don't care if Wildomar becomes a city or not, but it is inevitable that growth is coming. If you look at how screwed up the infrastructure is in the older parts of Murrieta and Temecula you can see what happens when developers and county supervisors decide what goes where and how its built. If the pro incorporation people are for growth and development then I am all for cityhood. However, if they raise my taxes because their accounting screwed up I will personally run for city council and make their life a living hell. Also if someone will promise to fix the potholes on Bundy Canyon Rd I promise to deliver about 50 votes for cityhood. There is a lot of talk about fire and police, but how would this effect water, sewage, trash, etc? "

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