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Wildomar incorporation bid on the line

By: *BRIAN ECKHOUSE - Staff Writer*

WILDOMAR ---- A lack of money to cover operating costs for a second fire station could doom efforts to incorporate the community as a city, despite the county's promise to help defray costs.

That was the tentative conclusion reached by the executive director of the Local Agency Formation Commission, an agency that analyzes incorporation and annexation bids and has to approve Wildomar's bid before it could go before voters.

While an initial analysis of Wildomar's finances predicted there would be an annual surplus, the most recent report indicates the community would be in the red by its third year if the second fire station were to be built. Currently, there is just one fire station within the 24-square-mile community.

In late April, the county Board of Supervisors -- recognizing that a second fire station would need to be built whether Wildomar becomes a city ---- agreed to have the county contribute some funds for the station's operations.

But George Spiliotis, the commission's executive director, noted the county has not committed



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to a specific amount of annual funding, so that can't be factored in to the commission's analysis.

However, incorporation proponent Bob Cashman said, the county can't negotiate the terms with the Wildomar because it isn't a city yet.

"And it can't be a city until you negotiate an amount, so it's a circular thing," he said. "Can you trust the unanimous decision of the Board of Supervisors that they will negotiate this? I would say yes."

The supervisors, which would consider the incorporation bid if endorsed by the commission, recently indicated they'd like Wildomar to incorporate as its own city. If Wildomar residents were to assume the costs of most, if not all, services to the community's residents, then the county would be relieved of some heavy financial obligations, cityhood advocates say.

Case for cityhood

Members of the Local Agency Formation Commission eventually were scheduled to consider the proposed incorporation of the community Thursday, but that hearing will be postponed to July 26 to allow a state agency time to review a challenge by a Wildomar resident to the financial analysis.

Gerard Ste. Marie has asked the state controller's office to review the financial analysis, questioning whether the county offer is legal.

When the incorporation proponents come before the commission, they will argue that local control of the community's fate is necessary to ensure "the atmosphere" of Wildomar remains, specifically its more rural feel than the cities that neighbor it, said Cashman, chairman of Wildomar Incorporation Now.

"You look around and see how Temecula and Murrieta are treating (available land): Everything seems to be buildable," he said. "We don't want to be a very large city."

Sheryl Ade, another leader of WIN, agreed, adding "we ultimately should decide what we look like and have to live with."

"You've got (county) planners coming through like a revolving door," Ade added. "These kids -- and yes, I call them kids ---- don't know Wildomar. They don't know what our vision is."

That vision recognizes growth is a reality ---- but with greater constraints than Murrieta and Temecula, a city Cashman described as "the Disneyland of development."

"We're not a rural community now," Ade said. "But we have a ranch community ---- hills with wildlife corridors. I like to say that we have elbow room, but it's not like we're out in the middle of Kansas."

Big obstacle

To try to convince LAFCO members that Wildomar is serious about incorporating, WIN had planned on hiring a bus to bring as many residents as possible to the hearing in Riverside.

But selling commission members on a concrete vision fashioned over a decade ---- and having dozens of residents present ---- likely won't be enough to sell them on the incorporation of Wildomar.

Ultimately, proponents will have to prove that a city of Wildomar would be financially viable.

In his report to the commission, WIN finance consultant Gary Thompson noted the Board of Supervisors directed county officials to enter into negotiations with Wildomar ---- if it incorporates ---- "to relieve the burden of absorbing this significant cost (for a fire station) in the early stages of the new city's formation."

Thus, he concluded, if a cost-sharing plan between the county and a city of Wildomar was sealed for the proposed fire station on Clinton Keith Road, that would ensure financial success for the community.

If LAFCO rejects the incorporation bid, Wildomar resident Bridgette Moore speculates that parts of the community could be annexed by neighboring cities Murrieta and Lake Elsinore. Wildomar has fought off previous annexation efforts from Murrieta.

With a rejection by LAFCO, Cashman says gridlock throughout Wildomar will be guaranteed -- -- much like in Murrieta.

Worse, Ade added, "we will lose the cohesion we have as a community."

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

Trusting County Officials? wrote on May 20, 2007 8:13 PM:

" I trusted Bob Buster when he promised there would be a new park on the East side of the 15 Freeway when he was trying to pawn off his Wildomar parks assessment on us. How many years will we need to wait to see that? And now Cashman wants us to trust Buster for millions of dollars if Wildomar incorporates? I don't think so. And now Brian Eckhouse is trying to get in the middle of this to affect an outcome, his bias in favor of Wildomar cityhood has been uncovered. "

Trusting County Officials? wrote on May 20, 2007 9:00 PM:

" I trusted Bob Buster's promises to build a new park on the East side of the 15 FWY when he was trying to pawn off his park maintenance assessment on Wildomar residents. But no park has been built, and no new park is on the horizon. Buster's credit is no good here. But now Cashman wants us to trust Buster for millions of dollars from

the County treasury if Wildomar incorporates? I don't think so. "

Common Sense wrote on May 21, 2007 10:07 AM:

" A spirit of cooperation and common sense would go a long way to resolving this. Mr. Spiliotis appears to have already decided the issue by his statements. How proper is that? Why take the position that the city will fail unless you prove to me otherwise, Mr. Spiliotis? That rings of guilty until proven innocent. The County Board of Supervisors unanimously agreed to assist Wildomar with the second station. Yet Spiliotis insists that agreement cannot be considered. Does that really make sense? Ste Marie has issue with feared tax increases yet the amount he has reportedly paid from his own pocket, \$25,000, to review the fiscal report and the proposed operational agreement on funding of the station would have paid many years worth of any feared property tax increase. Does that make sense? What's the return on that investment, Ste. Marie? We will all invest our dollars in our communities through property and sales taxes regardless of whether Wildomar incorporates or not. It just makes more sense to have locally elected residents that live in the community be responsive to, and responsible for how those dollars are used. Wildomar needs to become independent of the County Board of Supervisors, or it will be swallowed up by Murrieta and/or Lake Elsinore. How about some common sense, people? "

Wild Omar wrote on May 21, 2007 12:27 PM:

" I am with you on this - right now I do not trust the County or the WIN Folks. I would prefer to be taken over by either Lake Elsinore or Murrieta. "

Common Sense is No Inc!!! wrote on May 21, 2007 12:30 PM:

" Common sense and a reasonable person would notice that incorporation is a bad idea for Wildomar. Wildomar should be split between Lake Elsinore and Murrieta! "

Reardon wrote on May 21, 2007 2:07 PM:

" Common sense, and two experiences in incorporation, tell me that communities incorporate so as to gain control of development. Unfortunately, as a city comes the responsibility to build a City Hall, hire police, take over fire responsibility, hire permit people, inspectors, transportation...etc. Very quickly, the new City Management discovers that in order to pay for such overhead, they must approve every building permit submitted - including one for a six-story candy-striped massage parlor - in order to raise the kind of sales taxes and permit money required to run a City. There may well be good reasons to incorporate a community -- but control of development is certainly not one of them. "

Concerned-1 wrote on May 21, 2007 3:04 PM:

" I don't have an interest in Wildomar other than to enjoy driving through it from time to time. However, incorporating a community is a very bad idea, and should only be done because it has to. Right now, Wildomar may not be well represented, but you can vote the bum out and elect someone who cares. You don't want to become a city! "

Lack of Common Sense wrote on May 21, 2007 3:14 PM:

" Why would you want to be part of either Lake Elsinore or Murrieta? Neither one of them has expressed interest in annexing Wildomar. From what I've read in the papers they both have enough to deal with without adding to their populations. They both have city councils of five people. The residents of Wildomar wouldn't be able to elect a single council member to represent us as the base of voters in both Lake Elsinore and Murrieta would have a majority. This doesn't make any sense to me. Use your common sense to incorporate and to elect five Wildomar council members to represent Wildomar and who will not be concerned with Lake Elsinore or Murrieta. "

wildomar resident wrote on May 21, 2007 4:43 PM:

" I vote for Canyon Lake taking us over. At least they have a good City Manager and I have always wanted to Wakeboard. "

John wrote on May 21, 2007 5:53 PM:

" Wild Omar would be like splitting a person in two. The community of Wildomar was founded in 1886 and the name was formed from it's founders names--"Wil" (William Collier), "do" (Donald Graham) and "mar" (Margaret Collier Graham). It makes no sense to be part of any other city even if one had expressed in interest in doing so. How long would it take for an annexation? We can be our own city in 2008! "

Zygo wrote on May 21, 2007 8:56 PM:

" I'm curious as to the needed tax base to support a city. Not only does a city have to take over Sheriff services, including administration and detectives, but a city is expected to provide better coverage than the county areas. Also California now supplies traffic services, enforcement and investigation, which would now have to be paid for by the city. Has that been factored in? I'm not for or against incorporation, just curious if all cost factors have been added in. "

Community wrote on May 21, 2007 9:07 PM:

" A place does not become a community because it is called "City". A place becomes a community when the majority of the people who live in the community take an interest in the place where they live. The County Planning Commission has a website that shows what it is planned in the community. If people care, they provide comments to the County Planning Commission, be it pro or con. If you are a City, the same thing happens. The vast majority of the people in Wildomar never look at what the County is planning and never make comments. The same thing will happen if Wildomar is a city. You only have to look at the percentage of people who voted on the parks to see most people in Wildomar don't care. They really don't if we are a City or just part of the County. They just get in their car early in the morning, drive to work outside Wildomar and return late at night. "

KB wrote on May 22, 2007 7:39 AM:

" Gerard Ste. Marie may have a point about the legality of the county's offer, if the county starts to pay the city annually for funding of operations for the fire station other Riverside county cities might demand that the county pony up money for their cost of operations. "

To Zygo wrote on May 22, 2007 8:36 AM:

" Good questions. As for Sheriff services, those are administered by the County. Many cities, Lake Elsinore for one, contract with the County for those services, negotiating a fee for it, rather than create a whole new separate department. Officers paid for by that city are assigned to that city - not the surrounding unincorporated area. They are dedicated and earmarked for that city, thus they are more readily available for it's residents = better service. Sales and property taxes pay for those (and other) services. Residents pay taxes regardless of whether or not their area is a city. Upon incorporation those taxes paid (a portion of them) would then go to their city, instead of the County, to pay for those services. As for California providing law enforcement services, yes, they (we) pay for the CHP already. That would not change. Our taxes that we already pay to the State pay for the CHP, incorporated or not. "

To Community wrote on May 22, 2007 9:04 AM:

" While you may be proficient in using the web to get information, many, arguably most, in this community are not. There are many areas here that do not have any type of reasonably priced, reasonably fast, internet connectivity. Of the estimated 21,000 residents there are only a dozen or so of us commenting here. There are many elderly, many fixed income residents, that do not use the internet. They care, but they do not have access. They cannot make the journey to downtown Riverside to make a hearing. They cannot negotiate the traffic there. Yes, apathy exists - that's nothing new. Yet, if city hall were just a few blocks from us it would be safe to assume that there would be the likelihood of increased participation. The majority of people in Wildomar do care, and the only way to determine that would be by placing the issue before them on the ballot. "

Wild Omar wrote on May 22, 2007 3:09 PM:

" To John - I am aware of the local history - unlike many in the area I have been out here for more than 20-years. (not as long as some I know) Why would it not make sense to be part of any other city? What financial truth is out there (not just opinions) that Wildomar could survive as a City? I do not see the business base necessary in the area for us to be a city. To be honest I do not see a benefit to be unincorporated in the County, but I want facts not opinions to base the decision on. North Wildomar (SEDCO) used to be in the sphere of influence of Elsinore - maybe it should be once again. Even if we can be our own city in 2008, that does not mean that our problems go away - it may just increase them! "

Zygo wrote on May 22, 2007 6:08 PM:

" Re services...Nope...what I was talking about was the traffic enforcement services the CHP provides off the freeway. The CHP will continue to provide service on the freeway. The police dept. or contracted Sheriff's services will have to be paid by the city for additional officers for city traffic enforcement and investigation. The CHP does not contract for services within a city. If those costs have not been added in, then the costs have been underestimated. Also, Sheriff's detective services will be more expensive because the present detectives responsibilities are spread over a wide area. A dedicated detective, and supervision, is an added cost. "

John wrote on May 23, 2007 8:58 AM:

" To Wild Omar: The CFA and other reports have indicated Wildomar could be a viable city. This is what is currently in the process of being reviewed. As far as splitting Wildomar between Lake Elsinore and Murrieta is concerned, I feel we would be giving our voting powers completely away. Think about it. If the population of Wildomar (about 30,000) was divided between Murrieta (roughly 80,000) and Lake Elsinore (roughly 40,000) we would be part of a city where we would have no control over our destiny. Take Lake Elsinore for example, adding half of our 30,000 would give them a majority of almost 3 to 1. We wouldn't be able to elect even one council member to represent the best interests of Wildomar. Of course, with Murrieta it would be more like a 5 to 1 ratio. Murrieta could pretty much do what they wanted to our land--we would become their backyard dump. No thanks! I'll stick with a Wildomar city council where my vote will count! "

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