

Incorporation plan's bumpy path

By CAROLYN
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Seacliff Improvement Assn. apparently wants no part of the proposal to incorporate Aptos as a city.

There was no response at a meeting Thursday night to a request for a show of hands in favor of the incorporation drive led by the Aptos Chamber of Commerce. Most of the 20 persons who attended the program at Aptos Library agreed with Mervin Garibotto, association chairman, who said he believes the cityhood plan is premature.

The informal poll of the improvement association followed a talk by Ted Durkee, temporary director of the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), and a brief appearance by Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, who serves as one of five members on the LAFCO commission.

Both Durkee and Mrs. Liddicoat assured Aptos residents that if an approval is eventually given by LAFCO for incorporation proponents to proceed with the application, the decision only means LAFCO believes the issue important enough to place it before voters in an election.

Mrs. Liddicoat commented that LAFCO had received an angry response when Freedom annexation plans had been allowed to proceed. People had misinterpreted the vote as an endorsement, and so began a successful petition drive to keep the issue off the ballot.

"So, if the Aptos incorporation comes before LAFCO," she said, "We want to be very careful that people understand that if LAFCO approves it, the issue will be placed on the ballot for everyone to make up their own minds."

Durkee explained that all proposals concerning annexation, incorporation or disincorporation must come before the LAFCO commission. The commission itself was formed in 1963, he said, to ensure that people are informed about such issues, and that no actions can be taken until the public has the opportunity to state its opinion.

All the work now underway by incorporation proponents is preliminary to the application before LAFCO, Durkee said. The application must show whether it will economically and politically be feasible to create a city. It is the responsibility of the applicants to state reasons in support of the proposal, to furnish maps and show the chief petitioners in favor of incorporation.

Durkee added he believes proponents of the Aptos incorporation plan to gather signatures from 25 percent of the registered voters as chief petitioners. If this is done, the supporters will have six months from the time the first signature is taken until the last is received. If this legal requirement is filled, then the issue can be taken before LAFCO with a request to proceed.

The LAFCO director checks the materials, signs a certified document that the information is in proper order, and the process begins. The director will then prepare a report on such things as population density, land use, services,

need for community services, anticipated future needs, certainty of incorporation and probable effects of incorporation on neighboring communities.

"All this is part of the effort to get away from the days when special interests had control," he said.

When the incorporation proposal is considered by the commission, LAFCO can either disapprove the request, approve it or require changes to be made in the cityhood plans. If there is a denial, the issue dies. If approved, the plan then goes to the county Board of Supervisors and there are a number of hearings to test public sentiment.

If all the legal steps are followed and

the proposal is approved, Durkee said, the earliest the Aptos incorporation issue might reach the voters is the June primary next year.

Some of the things LAFCO will look for in its study of the Aptos incorporation proposal are whether or not there will be an adequate revenue base; if there is sufficient community identity and political maturity; and whether the boundaries make sense.

The impact of Prop. 13 will also be a significant factor, the director added. Under the present law, new cities have no property tax available to them.

"If an area incorporates," he said, "It must do it with sufficient income other than property tax."

The efforts to incorporate the areas of Soquel and Aptos are both breaking new ground in Santa Cruz County, the director said, because there have been only a few past efforts to incorporate, and none at all since Prop. 13.

Comments from members of the Seacliff Improvement Assn. questioned the ability of the incorporation effort to create a workable city plan.

"A great many people feel that sooner or later we will have to incorporate," Garibotto said, "But not until we have a darn sight more than we do now. Right now we can get into a lot of trouble."

One resident suggested that Aptos post a sign that reads, "Aptos City, Unincorporated."

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