

Aptos considers cityhood

1989 should be year of decision

By LANE WALLACE
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At this time next year, Aptos may be just a few days away from becoming Santa Cruz County's fifth city.

The prospect is "exciting," said Tom Carmody, spokesman for the Aptos Incorporation Group, which hopes to get through the governmental processes in time for the city to begin operations on Jan. 1, 1990.

But, said Carmody, "it's also a sobering thought that we'll be talking about real police forces and real budgets" in 1989.

The group of about 25 who formed the Aptos Incorporation Group in the spring of 1987 have accomplished a lot since then. They commissioned a preliminary feasibility study, held a number of public meetings, and earlier this year completed the major step of getting some 3,000 signatures on a petition supporting an incorporation election.

But all those efforts were just groundwork for what will happen in 1989: A full-fledged incorporation feasibility study, paid for by the proponents, a second study by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) staff, and decisions by LAFCO and the county Board of Supervisors on city boundaries and when the election will be held.

And then, if everything goes more or less according to plan, the issue could be up to the voters as early as November.

Carmody said he's "cautiously optimistic" about incorporation being approved, and acknowledges that the November and January target dates are goals, not deadlines.

Carmody doesn't see approval by the electorate as a foregone conclusion, but he feels it will be less of an obstacle than getting past LAFCO.

Carmody said he's confident the people will vote for incorporation "once the facts are known," noting that the preliminary study indicates an incorporated Aptos can be financially viable.

"LAFCO has other considerations besides the people of Aptos," Carmody said. If Aptos incorporates, the responsibility for a number of government services will be lifted from the county's shoulders, but so will some of the revenue.

Part of LAFCO's job is to determine such things as boundaries of the proposed city and some of the financial agreements between the city and county. It's LAFCO that decides whether an election will be held, but there is usually some room for negotiation.

One of the LAFCO members

is County Supervisor Robley Levy, whose district includes Aptos.

Levy said she has "yet to be convinced" about the viability of Aptos as a city and said she wants to see more information, mainly the feasibility studies, before making a decision. "The whole issue needs to be looked at more closely," she said. The new city (or town, as proponents like to call it) wouldn't be able to raise taxes. But, said Levy, the new council could impose business-license fees and utility taxes, which the county doesn't levy.

And while the Incorporation Group has been talking about a city with limited services, Levy said the Town Council could well find itself under some pressure to provide more services.

Once a city is formed, Levy said, the county's mobile-home rent-control laws wouldn't apply to the city, and the city would then have to hold hearings to consider a law of its own.

Carmody won't say Levy is an opponent of incorporation, but he does say some of her statements are "scare tactics."

For instance, Carmody said it's unlikely that there wouldn't be some sort of rent control for mobile homes, given the overwhelming rejection by county



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voters last month of a proposal to do away with rent control.

Incorporation proponents, who spent about five months of 1988 gathering signatures on petition, now must turn toward gathering something that's a little tougher to get: money.

Carmody figures at least \$10,000 will be needed for the feasibility study and campaign drive. The Incorporation Group's leaders will be meeting next month to plan fund-raising activities, he said.