

Aptos cityhood study considered

By ERIC BENTLEY JR.
STAFF WRITER

Aptos could become a city in less than two years if its tax base proves large enough to cover its costs, Fred Christiansen, a nationally recognized incorporation consultant, told a crowd of 90 people last night at Cabrillo College.

The gathering was the second called by leaders of the latest movement to investigate the possibility of incorporating the Aptos area. Similar movements in recent years have not succeeded.

The first step is to come up with the money for a preliminary feasibility study, Christiansen said.

Organizer Victor Marani said this morning that Christiansen quoted him a figure after last night's meeting of \$5,000 to \$8,000 for the study.

Marani and Terry Pershall, another organizer, said participants are ready to select a steering committee and a spokesman for what has so far been an informal information network. The committee should reach a decision within two weeks on whether to go ahead with the preliminary study, Marani said.

Marani called a decision to go ahead "highly likely."

Raising the money for the study shouldn't be any problem,

according to Marani, who says he's "got people with their checkbooks out, ready to sign."

If the study shows the tax base would be capable of paying for city services such as police, planning and building inspection, and if a petition circulated at the same time can gather at least 25 percent of the area's registered voters, the petition can be sent to the Local Agency Formation Commission for approval and modification.

From there, if it wins the approval of LAFCO, the petition would go to the county Board of Supervisors and then to a vote of Aptos residents.

Marani said it could come to a vote by March 1989, or possibly even the preceding November, "if this thing really catches fire." The city could incorporate within a couple of months after the election, he said.

If it incorporates, Aptos would become the county's third largest city in population, with an estimated 22,000 residents — and the largest geographically, if current plans materialize, with boundaries stretching from Cabrillo College on the north to the edge of La Selva Beach on the south.

Marani and Pershall stressed that they are not boosting incorporation at this point, only "trying to find out if it is

feasible," but they appeared more enthusiastic than otherwise.

Christiansen, who has guided five California cities through the incorporation process with his Oceanside consulting firm of Christiansen and Wallace, spelled out the feasibility-study process to a responsive crowd.

The consultant first writes to the county to find out what costs were incurred and income generated within the projected city boundary during the preceding year, Christiansen said.

He collects reports from the sheriff's office and the departments of planning, roads, animal control and building inspection on the costs of their respective programs.

And he writes to state and county departments for information on the revenue the city can expect from sources such as property tax, transient-occupancy (motel) tax, and auto registration fees.

The consultant then subtracts the cost of the city's mandated services from its expected revenues. If revenues don't exceed costs by more than 10 or 15 percent, Christiansen said, he advises residents not to incorporate.

If the difference is 15 percent or more, the consultant is ready to start the second part of the study, for which he charges

about \$10,000 on top of the \$5,000 to \$8,000 organizers will already have paid, Christiansen said.

The consultant then attempts to "build" the city on paper, as he looks at what services it will need in its first year.

He looks at existing services — law enforcement, fire, water, sewers — to see if they are adequate. If so, the city can keep them by contracting with the county or separate districts, and the fledgling city is spared the cost of initiating services on its own.

The city is aided in its first year by state provisions which require the county to provide many existing services free for one year following incorporation, Christiansen said. So the city can spend its first year generating revenue and putting together a staff and planning department.

But what happens after the first year — when mounting costs make staying in the black a difficult proposition, especially for places like Aptos that lack a strong industrial or commercial base?

At that time, Christiansen said, the joy of incorporation is that at least "you've got no one to blame but yourself."

Organizers plan to invite representatives from law enforcement agencies for the next meeting. The time and place have not yet been chosen.