

Advisory vote proposed for Aptos cityhood

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An advisory election on whether Aptos should incorporate has been proposed by Santa Cruz County Supervisor Walt Symons.

The election could be held in June on the same ballot to decide who will replace Congressman Leon Panetta, Symons said in a letter to fellow supervisors that will be considered Tuesday.

"We've been pushing for this (advisory election) for the last two or three weeks," said Doug McConnell, of the Aptos Incorporation Group. The group's six-year effort to make Aptos a city has been stalled by lawsuits, lack of money and what group members say is opposition from the county.

McConnell said leaders of the Incorporation Group spoke to three county supervisors — Symons, Ray Belgard and Jan Beautz — and are confident they have the three votes necessary to set the advisory vote. They went first to Symons, who took office in January; his district includes Aptos.

If the advisory vote is in favor of cityhood, and residents later ap-

prove it at an official election, Aptos would become Santa Cruz County's fifth city, joining Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Scotts Valley and Capitola.

Aptos would have a population of about 25,000 and would be the third largest city in the county. There are about 12,000 registered voters in the proposed city.

There are several possible glitches that supervisors will have to decide Tuesday. They are:

- Cost of the election. The Aptos Incorporation Group has agreed to pay up to \$10,000, which should cover election costs. That cost is based on having an election for the Congressional seat in June.

- But if somebody gets more than 50 percent of the vote in the April primary, there won't be a runoff in June.

- That will leave the Aptos issue alone on the ballot, and the cost of an election would then be about \$35,000, with nobody yet committed to pay for it. Supervisors must schedule the Aptos election by Feb. 23 to get on the June ballot.

- A deadline set by the Local Agency Formation Commission to

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come up with \$25,000 by April 8, for the first installment of an environmental impact report that will cost about \$100,000.

LAFCO, which oversees incorporation issues, set that deadline in January as a way of either getting the incorporation process going or dropping it.

The cost of the EIR has been the main reason incorporation efforts stalled in the last couple of years. The Incorporation Group, unable to raise anywhere near the amount required, lost a lawsuit challenging the EIR requirement.

Belgard and Symons said they hope LAFCO will postpone the April deadline if the election is scheduled. One vote for doing that is certain — Belgard is a member of LAFCO, comprised of city and county elected officials.

Symons could not be reached last night, but said during his campaign he would support loaning county money for the EIR if the advisory vote is strongly in favor of incorporation.

Belgard said last night he would give "serious consideration" to such a loan.

The advisory-vote discussion is set for the supervisors' morning agenda, which begins at 9 a.m.