

Initial figures look good for Aptos incorporation

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The hope some residents have of making Aptos a city showed the first signs of becoming a reality last night at a meeting at Cabrillo College.

Organizers presented preliminary estimates that showed an Aptos-area tax base capable of producing in 1988 half a million dollars more than the city's estimated expenditures.

Phrases such as "home rule" and "wanting to do a better job than the county" were heard frequently as more than 70 people crowded into a room designed for 50. They listened to plans for incorporating their area into what some organizers said would become the county's geographically largest city.

After presenting the preliminary financial estimates, which were prepared by Terry Stigall of the Watsonville finance department, organizers explained the step-by-step path toward incorporation. Two experts on incorporation law and finance answered questions.

Although organizers Victor Marani and Ken Fleissner maintained a restrained posture, calling themselves "objective facilitators" trying to "generate a factual base" rather than push for their position, the feeling in the room was optimistic.

The hypothetical city boundaries that organizers used included Cabrillo College and ran to the edge of La Selva Beach. It would include Rio del Mar and Seacliff on the coast and up into the foothills as far as Day Valley.

Stigall estimated a 1988 revenue for this area of over \$3.3 million, including \$1.2 million in property taxes, \$650,000 in sales and use taxes, and \$325,000 in transient occupancy (hotel and motel use) taxes.

He estimated expenditures at \$2.5 million, including salaries and benefits for 45 to 50 city employees.

Expenditures could be reduced even further if the city were to contract out its services, an expert in public finance said.

The expert, Dennis Hermanson, a public finance specialist brought in by Fleissner and Marani, said it was usual for newly incorporated cities to contract out most of their services, such as fire protection, until they become established, and even then, many choose to stay with minimum services of their own.

Stigall's report by no means demonstrated clear sailing for a future city of Aptos, the evening's featured speakers repeatedly stressed.

Hermanson warned of the "many hidden costs" of incorporation, including state-mandated services which the state is supposed to pay for but often doesn't. He said organizers should expect city costs to grow geometrically.

"To think that you're going to increase services may be an illusion," said attorney Richard Hargrove, an expert in city law. But despite the difficulties, Hargrove said incorporation "is possible, and almost certain to be of greater satisfaction" than remaining unincorporated.

"Identity may be the most important factor," Hargrove said.

Other participants cited political hurdles to be overcome.

Local businessman Doug McConnell expressed a fear that some members of the Local Agency Formation Commission, to which organizers must submit their petition for approval, will see incorporation as a "loss of their power base." He stressed, as did other organizers, the need to avoid political polarization around the issue.

Participants, nevertheless, expressed the belief that this attempt carries a far greater chance of success than the

aborted effort of seven years ago, which fizzled for lack of broad support.

"There's a broader constituency this time," McConnell said of the new group of people sponsoring the effort. "The last time, people saw it as a movement of real estate developers. Now all kinds are involved in it."

The next step for incorporation boosters, "assuming people are still interested after our next meeting," Marani said, is to form subcommittees to draw up some firmer financial figures and to raise money to pay for a full-fledged feasibility study.

In addition, organizers will seek support from the county accounting department and the advice of state agencies.

Organizers will then circulate a petition to area voters. If they can get signatures from 25 percent of local registered voters, their petition will go to the Local Agency Formation Commission for approval, then to the county board of supervisors and finally to a local vote.

The next meeting will be June 9 at 7 p.m. at Cabrillo College.

REFERENCE