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Chamber head says cityhood will turn Aptos into Paradise

By BOB SMITH

Signatures supporting Aptos' incorporation are being gathered at the rate of 100 a day by paid and volunteer petition circulators, Aptos incorporation committee chairman Mrs. Glenn Specht told reporters Monday afternoon.

With the new drive well underway, Mrs. Specht and Aptos Chamber of Commerce president Larry Wrathall are now confident that the group will have more than the 2,500 signatures needed by the March 3rd deadline to send the incorporation issue to the county Local Agency Formation Commission and the county Board of Supervisors for further study.

"It's damn near positive now," Mrs. Specht told reporters. "It's always been a matter of getting enough people out to ask."

She said there are now five to seven people, some paid and some volunteer, working two hours or more each day to gather signatures. Some are being paid by contributions, but she declined to specify the source other than to say they came from people unable to personally collect the signatures.

The committee needs approximately 2,500 signatures to qualify the petition, but the group is going for 3,000 or more.

"It's not overwhelming support for incorporation," Mrs. Specht said of those signing the petitions, "but it is people who want it studied further."

"We would like for the people of Aptos to have the choice (of incorporation) available to them."

She and Wrathall presented the committee's latest incorporation study, including

a comparison with the newly-incorporated Town of Paradise in Butte County, to the Rio del Mar Improvement Association board of directors Monday afternoon.

Paradise residents voted 55 percent in favor of incorporation last November, and the newly elected Town Council is now setting up municipal government.

The Butte County LAFCO report on the Paradise incorporation was furnished to the Aptos committee by Santa Cruz County LAFCO executive officer Bill Davis.

Paradise, according to Wrathall, has a land area of double the size of Aptos, but its population is almost equal to the Aptos estimate of 27,000, and its demographics are the same.

The reasons for incorporating Paradise are good ones for Aptos, Wrathall and Mrs. Specht told the RDM directors.

"In the wake of Prop. 13, municipal incorporation is the only form of local government that can maintain and/or increase the level of municipal services in the community of Paradise," Wrathall said, reading from the LAFCO study.

"Municipal incorporation in the community of Paradise is fiscally feasible, with no increases in general taxes, fees or charges for current services. Furthermore, Prop. 13 eliminates the possibility of a municipal government raising taxes on property above the mandated \$4 rate."

There are other similarities between the two communities. Like Paradise, Aptos is served by the county sheriff, the California Highway Patrol, a fire protection district, and a county park and recreation district.

"Prop. 13," the Butte County report stresses, "has seriously reduced the revenue generating capacity of several special districts which now serve the community of Paradise, most notably the Paradise Fire Protection District and Paradise Recreation and Park District."

"Significant reductions (as high as 40 percent) in the Paradise Fire Protection District's 1979-80 budget are expected to force the district to reduce its services proportionately."

The report also noted:

"Municipal incorporation in the community of Paradise is to the major local governmental problems that face the community, including:

"The lack of local control over planning and land use matters.

"The current low level of police protection.

"The expected reductions of municipal services (particularly fire protection) that face property tax dependent special districts in the wake of lost revenue caused by Prop. 13.

"Municipal incorporation," the LAFCO report continued, "will bring immediate benefits to the citizens of the community and net long term benefits to the citizens of Butte County, as a whole, by increasing the total share of state and federal revenue that comes to the community and Butte County, as a whole."

"Municipal incorporation will allow Paradise to gather increased shares from state and federal revenue sources that now are used by other local government jurisdictions. Municipal incorporation will relieve Butte County of its costly service responsibilities in the community, with a net gain to other county residents."

Wrathall also argued to the directors, who have been lukewarm to the incorporation proposal in the past, that cityhood would give Aptos the political recognition and identity it deserves.

"Our political importance could be greater than it is," Wrathall said. "We are very important politically in the county, and we should deal with these crucial decisions."

"To postpone these decisions," Wrathall argued, "is not right."

"And we do have the economics to govern ourselves efficiently with the revenues we have," Wrathall, a life-

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(Continued from page 1)

long Aptos resident and radio station owner argued.

Mrs. Specht doesn't expect to see the Aptos incorporation issue on the ballot before June, 1981, and even if cityhood was approved, residents would have a year to prepare before taking over responsibility for all municipal operations in the area.

In the meantime, they said, the county would be charged with continuing to provide service, including police protection and public works, and the tax revenues from the state would flow into the Aptos city treasury.

County Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat was visibly unhappy at the prospect of the county providing the services without getting any of the money in the transition period, but she remained silent during that portion of the presentation.

She broke her silence to question Wrathall on his views towards land use after Aptos becomes a city. Would it be a growth or no-growth city, she asked.

"There will be a debate in Aptos," said Wrathall, noting that even the incorporation

committee and the Chamber members are split on the issue.

"I fall into the category of controlled growth," Wrathall added. "I believe a person has certain rights and a city telling a man not to build is confiscation.

"I feel that 55-60 percent of the community would favor controlled growth. But it is not the amount of growth, but the quality of growth that is important," Wrathall added.

And Mrs. Specht added: "there will be five people who live in Aptos who will make the decisions here, not people who live in Santa Cruz, Watsonville or the San Lorenzo Valley."

RDM board president Melvin Fields wanted to know the advantages to the Rio del Mar resident of incorporation, noting that Rio del Mar is 85 percent built out now.

"We could support the fire district; maybe we could help out with the water supply problems," Mrs. Specht answered.

"But if we offered nothing more than traffic control for Rio del Mar and Clubhouse Drives, I would think that there would be a lot of people

in favor of it."

"The Sheriff and the CHP have announced they have to cut back and we need a lot more protection than they offer now.

"There are extreme police problems in the Rio del Mar flats area," she added.

"So there are two major areas to be helped by incorporation," said Fields, summing up the benefits to Rio del Mar, "traffic and maintenance of the road system. Planning is relative to the newer areas."

Wrathall said the business community, as represented by the Chamber, is looking at it from another viewpoint. "So long as we are perceived to be a population base for the support of the remainder of the county, then it is incumbent on the business community to maximize its business."

Incorporation is one way, Wrathall added. "It aids the business community to be defined."

"I'm not saying a city is the best answer," Mrs. Specht added, "and I'm still reserving my vote. But I want to see the LAFCO study made and the public hearings held."