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Incorporation push grows

Rancho Cordova kicks in funds to help El Dorado Hills' try; other panels consider doing so.

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - *(Published May 20, 2004)*

After years of struggling at home to raise money for economic and environmental studies, El Dorado Hills cityhood proponents have taken their campaign on the road and found the audiences receptive.

In response to the El Dorado Hills Incorporation Committee's plea for financial help, the Rancho Cordova City Council on Monday night allocated \$25,000 toward the cityhood effort. Earlier in the day, the El Dorado Irrigation District board of directors agreed to consider a \$25,000 loan to help pay for studies necessary to bring incorporation to a vote.

Incorporation committee Chairman John Hidahl said similar requests will be presented to the Folsom, Citrus Heights and Elk Grove city councils.

"We might be able to become a part of history and help El Dorado Hills become a city," Harry Norris, El Dorado Hills' representative on the irrigation district board, said in urging support for the funding.

He noted that the committee faces a tight time line to place an incorporation measure on the November 2005 ballot.

Before soliciting financial aid from governmental agencies, the committee had received about \$100,000 in cash contributions and pledges. But Hidahl said an additional \$160,000 is needed.

The committee was to have deposited about \$360,000 by May 14 with the El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission, which rules on governmental reorganizations in the county. The committee seeks to negotiate for a lesser amount or to pay for the studies in phases.

Irrigation district board members sought additional information from staff and stopped short of authorizing the funding request Monday. Some said they favored a loan over a grant.

Directors said they wanted to ensure that appropriating money for the incorporation effort wouldn't constitute a gift of public funds. District counsel Tom Cumpston said a contribution would not be a problem provided the district could demonstrate it served a public purpose.

Hidahl argued that the environmental studies for the incorporation could be useful to the district in planning water and sewer facilities in El Dorado Hills. As a city, he added, El Dorado Hills could aid the district in its bid for new water supplies.

"It's one more voice to request additional water sources to serve the western slope," Hidahl said.

Noting that El Dorado Hills residents have been among the most vocal in opposing growth in the county, director John Fraser questioned whether they would advocate for new water sources if they perceived that additional supplies would promote growth.

Hidahl estimated that 50 percent of the community's residents might be categorized as slow-growthers, but, he said, "I don't see a widespread effort to limit growth in El Dorado Hills."

Director George Osborne said he would support a loan to the incorporation effort if an agency such as the El Dorado Hills Community Services District served as guarantor to ensure that the money is repaid if cityhood failed. If El Dorado Hills incorporates, the new city would repay the loan. The board directed staff to discuss the possibility with community services district officials.

In addition, they requested information on the amount of property tax revenue the district would lose to a new city. Staff members said they thought the loss to the district would be relatively small.

Norm Rowett, vice chairman of the incorporation committee, said the district could stipulate that its funds be used for a specific purpose, such as the environmental study.

About the Writer

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