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## El Dorado Hills cityhood bid falters

**The incorporation drive, opposed by county officials and business leaders, is soundly defeated.**

**By Cathy Locke and Walter Yost -- Bee Staff Writers**

**Published 2:15 am PST Wednesday, November 9, 2005**

El Dorado Hills residents decided to stick with the marriage. With all 21 precincts reporting, voters turned down a proposal to split with county government and become a city.

In a race in which opponents challenged the fiscal viability of incorporation, voters rejected cityhood Measure P, 57.1 percent to 42.9 percent. The results were disappointing to those who worked for eight years and raised more than \$400,000 to bring the measure to a vote.

Cityhood opponents who showed up at Fred and Nancy St. Jean's home Tuesday night were greeted by a front yard decorated with a row of candle-lighted, carved pumpkins spelling out "Vote No on Measure P." They set the tone for an optimistic gathering of incorporation foes who early in the evening divided their attention between the election and watching the Kings game on the St. Jean's big-screen television.

"I think we'll win handily, by a 2-1 margin," Fred St. Jean said.

John Hidahl, chairman of the El Dorado Hills Incorporation Committee and a candidate for the city council, said. "We're obviously very disappointed with the outcome. We thought in the last two or three weeks that we had been able to get our message out."

Hidahl said cityhood backers plan to keep their group intact and pursue other goals, such as electing an El Dorado Hills resident to the Board of Supervisors.

A defeat for Measure P also was a disappointment to the five city council candidates - Hidahl, Jeff Haberman, Larry Brilliant, Greg Murphy and John R. Knight - who were the front-runners in a field of 19 to lead the new city, had incorporation passed.

Incorporation foes, led by former county Supervisor Bob Dorr, contended that cityhood would lead to higher taxes and fees for residents and businesses.

"We've talked with people who've lived here a long time and they all feel like we do," Nancy St. Jean said. "We want a quiet little community. We don't want a city."

The St. Jeans have lived in one of El Dorado Hills' older neighborhoods for 30 years.

The El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce and El Dorado Hills Fire Department boards also opposed incorporation, and county officials, including Auditor-Controller Joe Harn and Supervisor Helen Baumann argued against cityhood in campaign mailers.

Chamber directors said incorporation proponents failed to explain how cityhood would benefit businesses. Although the Fire Department would remain an independent special district, directors said they feared a cash-strapped city might seek to boost revenue by taking over fire services.

Cityhood proponents criticized the naysayers for a lack of vision. Similar fiscal arguments, they said, were mounted in 1987, when El Dorado Hills Community Services District developed the 40-acre Community Park.

The park has defined the community, they said, arguing that cityhood was the logical next step.

Opponents raised the specter of uncontrolled growth and big-box stores, saying the community's character would be transformed in the quest for revenue to support city services.

But incorporation supporters said El Dorado Hills, despite its rural roots, has become an urban community, and county governments are not designed to provide urban services.

Like it or not, they said, growth will continue under agreements approved by the county Board of Supervisors. Approximately 95 percent of the land within the incorporation boundaries has been developed or is covered by development agreements.

Incorporation proponents argued that the remaining development would be better managed by a city council rather than the county supervisors, none of whom lives in El Dorado Hills.

Cityhood backers included the Bass Lake Action Committee, representing several neighborhoods on the community's eastern edge. President Kathy Prevost said residents were concerned about timely improvements to Bass Lake Road and increased traffic patrols to combat speeding in residential neighborhoods. A city government charged with local law enforcement would be better able to respond to neighborhood issues, she argued.

"The county isn't really in the business of running a city, and we really are a little city down here," Prevost said.

Also supporting incorporation were El Dorado Hills Soccer Club and El Dorado Hills Little League.

Soccer Club board president Marc Pearl said the board, representing 1,500 youth soccer players, has struggled to avoid turning away players for lack of playing fields.

El Dorado Hills Community Services District has done its best to create parks and playing fields on land provided by developers under county agreements, he said, but the sites often are small and hilly and don't lend themselves to sports fields.

"We're just an area within the county. We don't get the attention that a large developer does," he said.

Parents, he said, would have more influence with a city council.

Incorporation opponents, however, said they doubted the city would have the revenue to deliver the level of services expected.

Harn, the county auditor-controller, contributed \$2,500 from his campaign fund to oppose incorporation.

He said the fiscal analysis for incorporation indicates a city of El Dorado Hills would rely more heavily on property tax revenue than most cities.

In the months since the analysis was prepared, he said, the housing market has shifted and demand has declined for the upscale homes that characterize the community.

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