

# May Unite to Form City

By John Wildermuth  
Chronicle Peninsula Bureau

Four tiny San Mateo County communities are talking about forming a new city to limit growth along the county's largely undeveloped coast.

Although any decision on establishing a city is still a long way off, residents of Montara, Moss Beach, Princeton and El Granada are looking for ways to gain more control over their unincorporated communities, which are run by the county Board of Supervisors in Redwood City.

"It doesn't seem like anyone is listening to us on the other side of the hill," said Nancy Hansen of El Granada. "It's like San Mateo County extends from the bay to the mountains with the coast not even there."

Hansen heads the 4-month-old Mid-Coast Community Council, which was formed to give the coastal towns a unified voice in dealing with the county. It was founded after local residents wound up on the losing end of several development decisions, including the recent approval of plans to build a \$20 million hotel-restaurant complex at Pillar Point Harbor in Princeton.

"The Pillar Point project really brought things home," Hansen said. "Here is this big project that doesn't seem to fit on the coast, and when 100 people stand up to complain to the supervisors, they pass it anyway."

County planners and supervisors approved the Pillar Point Harbor Village project late last year, and the California Coastal Commission also approved the proposal earlier this month, despite objections from community groups.

## 20-Year Battle

Although Hansen stressed that her group is not opposed to all development, residents of San Mateo's coast have been trying to limit growth in the area for more than 20 years.

The fog-shrouded coast is about as isolated as any part of an urbanized county can be. Only two-lane Highway 92 and narrow, winding Highway 1 link the city of Half Moon Bay and the small communities around it to the rest of San Mateo County.

Attempts to make the area more accessible — by building a Highway 1 bypass around Devil's Slide or widening Highway 92 — have been fought by residents worried that better roads will bring more visitors and even more pressure for development.

"We're not here to provide glitzy weekend tourist spots," said Nancy Maule of Montara. "This is not the city; it's a largely rural area that should stay that way."

## Rise in Traffic

Keeping it that way will not be easy. More and more people are moving to the coast and commuting to work, jamming Highway 92 every morning and afternoon. On weekends, lines of cars roll along the Coast Highway as people visit the beaches, parks and woodlands.

If the 10,000 or so people who live in the unincorporated area between Devil's Slide and Half Moon Bay want more control over their



communities, their choices are limited. The easiest solution, annexation to Half Moon Bay, worries many coastal residents who believe that the city is eager to grow.

"People in Half Moon Bay already are fighting a plan for (a development with) 1,000 new homes, big hotels and a 54-hole golf course," said Hansen. "I really don't want my community to become Disneyland."

Incorporating the four towns into a single city might not be the answer either. A 1985 study by the county's Local Agency Formation Committee found that the unincorporated area, with its restaurants, inns and small stores, did not have enough commercial tax base to pay for the services a new city would have to provide. Bringing in enough business to finance a new city could require the same development they want to avoid.

"The people are fighting that small commercial strip near Princeton (at Pillar Point), but if they're going to be a city, that's exactly the type of development they need," said county Supervisor Bill Schumacher.

Experts say it would require at least two years and some expensive studies before a new city could be formed. A more basic problem is that many people are not sure what they want their communities to be, Schumacher said.

"In one way, the people on the coast want to be rural, but on the other hand, they want municipal services, paved streets and services for kids," he said. "It's tough to have both."

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