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Golden Hills and Tehachapi Study Annexation

by Pierre Hartman

In a historic joint session on March 24, the Tehachapi City Council and the Golden Hills Community Services District Board of Directors agreed to appoint a joint committee to study and report on the feasibility of merging the two communities through annexation.

The council and board decided to call their creation the "Ad Hoc Golden Hills Annexation Feasibility Committee." It will consist of eight members, four from each community. One of each set of four will be an elected representative, another will represent local business interests, and two will represent the general residential population of each community.

The council named Mariana Teel, Tehachapi mayor, as the city's co-chair of the committee; councilman Ed Grimes will be Teel's alternate. The Golden Hills board appointed member John Crowdy as its co-chair, and Ed Hamlin, current president of the board, as Crowdy's alternate. Later, at its regular meeting on April 17, the board appointed the other three representatives on the feasibility committee. Glenn Baumann and Charles Dodds were named to represent all residents, and Dan Ingram was named for Golden Hills business interests.

On April 21, the city council named Mary Ann Hester and Marti Sprinkle as Tehachapi residents' representatives, but there were as yet no applicants for the Tehachapi business representative position. Hence the appointment was postponed to the May 5th council meeting, too late for publication in this issue of the Mountain Signal.

Crowdy made the initial presentation to the joint session, explaining that for the last year-and-a-half a Golden Hills and Tehachapi liaison committee had been consulting on problems of mutual concern, such as water supply, traffic control, business and park development. Crowdy described the consultation as "unprecedented cooperation" between the two communities, and noted growing interest in pursuing cooperative solutions to the problems of growth and change. At a certain point, he said, the liaison group realized that the idea of "maximum cooperation" implied the possibility of annexation. In his presentation to the joint session, Crowdy stressed the goal of obtaining the "widest possible input" from both communities. Golden Hills is growing, he said, and will continue to do so; the only question is, "who will direct that growth?" Crowdy pointed to Lancaster and Palmdale as a cautionary example of unplanned and uncoordinated growth that should be avoided locally if at all possible.

The reception by other council and board members might be called "guardedly optimistic;" virtually all members agreed that unless the citizens of both communities were supportive, annexation would not be pursued. Mayor Teel said it would be very important for the study committee to explore and report back on "all of the positives and negatives" of annexation, and former Tehachapi mayor Phil Smith urged residents to provide the committee with input. Tehachapi city manager Jason Caudle and Golden Hills general manager Bill Fisher said the feasibility committee will have full access to staff support.

Ed Hamlin noted that many residents of Golden Hills would like to retain its semi-rural character, and said that annexation would not automatically impose a requirement that it acquire the same type of urban infrastructure found in Tehachapi. Meanwhile, he said, Golden Hills will pursue consolidation of its CC&Rs, which have been reduced to a single comprehensive draft that will soon be ready for legal review prior to submission to a vote by residents. If annexation eventually takes place, he added, it would greatly simplify enforcement of the CC&Rs.

Dan Ingram, longtime local realtor and businessman, remarked that whether or not a merger takes place, Golden Hills and Tehachapi together constitute a "community of interest." "There were efforts to promote a merger back in the '70s," he said, but they were "shot down by ego and personality conflicts."

Charles Dodds observed that it will take some careful study to estimate accurately the various financial considerations, such as shifts in tax revenue, but he said that annexation would "substantially increase"



Jack Palance on *Bonjovi*, the horse he rode in the Taco Bell Commercial and Jill Rappaport riding *John Wayne* on Palances' Ranch
Photo by Chelley Kitzmiller

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the combined share, based in part on the greater total property value in Golden Hills. Dodds, a former manager with the Los Angeles Department of Public Works sewer division, also indicated that annexation would facilitate the creation of an economic sewer system that Golden Hills will eventually need, because of the existing treatment plant in Tehachapi. Glenn Baumann emphasized the fact-finding role of the Committee. "Without facts, we'd have only uninformed opinions," he said. "Getting the facts will be our main focus. It's not about 'us vs. them;' we need to find out what's best for the whole region," Baumann added.

Tehachapi city manager Jason Caudle stated a pair of key questions: "Would annexation be in the interest of good government?" and "Can we afford it?" He estimates that there is a greater dollar volume of retail business in the city than in Golden Hills, so current "sales tax collections favor the city. On the other hand, total assessed property valuation [and property tax collections] may be higher in Golden Hills," he said, and expressed agreement that the feasibility committee will need to work hard to develop all the relevant facts before any decision is made on the annexation question.



Jill Rappaport, Correspondent for NBC News' top-rated morning program *The Today Show* and Our very own Jack Palance
Photo by Chelley Kitzmiller

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