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## Land plans face deadline, doubters

**CITY:** It is rushing to annex land of debated value to get the coveted Arrowhead plan processed.

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*The Press-Enterprise*

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San Bernardino officials are racing to prepare annexation applications for a dozen county pockets within the city in the next month.

Meeting the June 1 deadline is a crucial step toward winning a long-sought prize: the Arrowhead Springs resort.

On April 19, the San Bernardino County Local Agency Formation Commission, which oversees city boundaries, required San Bernardino to absorb the county parcels as the price for processing the Arrowhead Springs development plan.

Both annexations have unanswered questions.

First, Arrowhead Springs' \$1 billion development proposal faces an August trial date in a lawsuit brought by a conservation group.

Second, city officials don't yet know how much it will cost to serve the county pockets, which total 440



A proposal for the Arrowhead Springs resort faces a lawsuit from a conservation group that accuses San Bernardino city officials of ignoring threats to the environment in approving the project. The development plan is worth \$1 billion.

Stan Lim / The Press-Enterprise

acres.

According to a staff report, one 99-acre neighborhood straddling Highway 30 at Del Rosa Avenue will bring San Bernardino only about \$76,000 in property taxes annually.

"That's not even enough for one police officer," said City Councilman Neil Derry.

The area generates far more than its share of crime calls, he said.

Derry said other areas require less police service but lack city amenities such as sidewalks and sewage systems.

He predicted that acquiring the parcels would be a money-loser.

Development Services Director James Funk said his staff derived the tax figure for the Del Rosa pocket based on the neighborhood's low property values and San Bernardino's 17 percent share of taxes. Staffers still are calculating the cost of serving all the parcels, he said.

Mayor Pat Morris said even if the acquisitions do turn out to be expensive, there's more than one way of measuring cost.

"It's going to be an expense to our city, but there's an offsetting benefit. We'll be better able to control what happens in those zones," he said.

The unincorporated areas already cost city residents, Morris said. Criminals don't check jurisdictions before committing a crime. And by increasing standards for everything



Charles Walker, 25, drives his go-cart in an unincorporated area of San Bernardino. Proposals are under way to prepare annexations for county pockets within the city.

Terry Pierson / The Press-Enterprise

from fire safety to street lighting, city government will help property values increase as well, he said.

City Councilwoman Wendy McCammack, who eventually will represent the 99-acre pocket, was more skeptical.

“Annexations for developed land always end up costing a city money,” she said.

But McCammack’s ward also includes Waterman Avenue, the route from Highway 30 to the Arrowhead Springs project. City officials expect business will grow along the corridor once the Arrowhead Springs project is built.

She said she strongly supports the project.

Thomas Thornburg, president of American Development Group, Inc., said the first phase of the 2,000-acre project could be complete within two years.

His plans call for an expansion of the resort’s 135-room hotel, a second 300-room hotel and a 199-acre golf course, plus as many as 1,350 homes and 1 million square feet of commercial and office space.

The original hotel, built in 1939, is

so well preserved that Thornburgh could open it within two weeks if he needed to, he said.

Adam Keats, staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said project backers shouldn’t plan on starting before they satisfy a judge.

In December, the center filed a lawsuit accusing city officials of poor planning and ignoring threats to the environment in approving a plan for the project.

The suit claims the city’s environmental review failed to survey for wildlife and ignored comments from the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

An Aug. 23 hearing is scheduled in San Bernardino Superior Court.

LAFCO has a policy of delaying its public hearings on annexation bids until such litigation is resolved. But the commissioners set aside that policy after hearing from Morris and John Nolan, an attorney representing the city government and American Development.

If the Center for Biological Diversity had a strong case, its attorneys could have posted a bond and sought a court injunction to block the project, Nolan said. By failing to pursue that

routine step, the environmentalists essentially admitted they had a weak case, he said.

That argument apparently swayed the commissioners.

Keats did not attend the hearing. In a telephone interview, he said non-profits are exempt from the bond requirement. He said he decided not to seek an injunction only because Nolan assured him the project wouldn’t go forward while litigation was under way.

“There may be people at LAFCO who want to green-light this project,” he said. “They have this visceral reaction against environmental groups getting in the way of people getting money. But there is still a very strong chance that this project won’t go forward.”