



CITY OF LA JOLLA IN 2004?

They call it The Jewel—an emerald and sapphire peninsula that beckons international tourists and scenery seeking homebuyers who do not mind endless rush hours.

But the City of San Diego's most sparkling gem, La Jolla, is about to pop out of its setting. A hibernating but festering secession movement that has sporadically surfaced for at least fifty years has awakened, again.

And frustrated Carmel Valley and Torrey Hills activists, worried about an out of control city bureaucracy supporting big and bigger buildings, increased density and more open space encroachment, are paying very close attention.

Proponents in La Jolla say that the time is right because changes in the laws governing city formation in California have changed making it easier for unhappy communities to break-up with their unresponsive big city governments.

With the passage of an assembly bill in 1997 written to help the San Fernando Valley dump Los Angeles, SB62, communities no longer need approval to leave from their City Councils whose previous veto power cooled most hotbeds of rebellion.

Now, secession organizers would have to gather signatures from a quarter of its registered voters, pay for and conduct a financial feasibility study that includes evidence that the secession is revenue neutral for San Diego and the new City of La Jolla, and if they receive certification of the study from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), they must win approval from San Diego voters.

Figuring that a combination of the historic irreconcilable differences that clearly irritates San Diego city council members and some pay-off money to the voracious big city government coffers might convince San Diego to let them go with a grunting sigh of relief, a simple pass of the hat at the first organizing meeting last week raised significant money for a secession effort.

In politics, money means business. In La Jolla, whose leaders usually put their money where their mouths are for political causes and candidates, there is enough TNT to separate the entire peninsula from San Diego under the right circumstances.

There are plenty of fires burning in La Jolla, perhaps enough to light the secession fuse this time—from Miami-fication fears brought on by San Diego's new City of Villages plan, to anger over a proposal to install ugly parking meters in the village and in residential neighborhoods, to fury over the city's recent sale of La Jolla public open space.

The list of complaints from activists could fill a Russian novel, but the common theme is symbolized by La Jolla's chronically potholed streets—the city treats them as second class citizens while charging them first class fees and taxes.

Former La Jolla Town Council President Paul Kennerson, who ran for San Diego City Council last time out in hopes of getting La Jolla a little respect, thinks that the La Jolla secession movement is hot enough to get a measure on the 2004 ballot.

And, he has signed on to the secession organizing committee that includes several prominent community leaders. He says that La Jolla is well equipped to pay San Diego enough alimony, he calls it "La Jolla-mony," by issuing bonds to meet the revenue neutral test and therefore qualify for the ballot.

Jerry Mailhot, who once headed a secession movement in Carmel Valley, agrees with Kennerson that today's conditions are far more favorable for secession movements like the one emerging in La Jolla than when he pursued the idea.

Mailhot tried the secession route when the San Diego City Council changed Carmel Valley's Community Plan and approved a big-box K-Mart anchored shopping center on Valley Center Road. After gathering thousands of signatures, he dropped the idea when it became clear that the City Council would veto any attempt to split.

Now that the recent legislation removed the City Council approval barrier, Mailhot thinks that a La Jolla secession movement might well have traction.

Collecting enough signatures within La Jolla is the easy part. LAFCO, the state agency charged with overseeing and approving "detachments of territory to and/or from cities," is no push-over, which means extensive, read expensive, studies.

And, LAFCO commissioners include two San Diego County Supervisors, two representatives from incorporated cities, two special districts members, one San Diego City Council Member and a public representative, a situation which leaves the secession folks looking like gladiators waiting for a thumbs up from Nero.

The prospects of running for reelection in 2004 with La Jolla secession on the ballot is just too gruesome for any City Council or Supervisorial incumbent to contemplate.

But, LAFCO rules dictate that commissioners who have received more than \$250 in contributions from people or entities involved in a proposal must disqualify themselves from voting. Finding a City Council Member or a County Supervisor free of campaign contributions from affected La Jollans is like searching for the abominable snowman, which could give the City of La Jolla at least a fighting chance.

Last week, the city approved changing the annoyingly misnamed Ardath Road freeway exit sign off I-5 to La Jolla Parkway. Could 2004 be the year the sign changes one more time to read City of La Jolla?