

Chapter 8

“LET PETE KEEP HIS HORSES”

At the Formation Committee’s party on election night I had said to the crowd that whenever they wanted to use an expletive they should say, “Schabarum.” I proclaimed that I wanted to see that word listed as an expletive in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I suspect many others felt the same way. However, tempers cooled, and years later, when the law caught up with Pete Schabarum, I did not feel elated.

Scott Newhall spoke for many of us in his editorial, “Let Pete Keep His Horses.”

Tuesday, November 3, 1987

To paraphrase the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt – “This is a date that will live in history.”

Last Tuesday the people of the Santa Clarita Valley survived a sneak attack by the big-money forces of out-of-town speculators, and by an overwhelming majority they voted to free themselves from the everlasting boondoogle of downtown County government.

On Tuesday, November 3, 1987, the Santa Clarita Valley became a free and independent member in the select and privileged peerage of American cities.

The battle was long, and it was tough. This newspaper therefore is honored to pay tribute to those cityhood boosters who carried on the battle for independence. For two long years these SCV heroes fought with empty purses, armed with a home-made arsenal of coffee and doughnuts, barrel staves, pitchforks and discarded tennis racquets and pointed sticks against the well-organized gang of mercenary soldiers from across the hills and far away.

The Santa Clarita Valley boosters were sustained by a sense of destiny. Almighty God was marching in their van; the angels were at their side. They marched to victory undaunted by the shot and shell of dirty politics; they ignored the whine of bullets; they were deaf to the enemies’ telephone boiler rooms urging the defeat of cityhood. They were fearless in the face of filthy whispering campaigns and enemy slanders, and undeterred by the snap and crackle of fraudulent handbills and false flyers.

Yes, our volunteers out-fought the phony newspaper ads bought and paid for by fake “grassroots” political action committees. And they confirmed the gutter strategy of Pete Schabarum, the Los Angeles County Supervisor who mounted a personal vendetta against our ill-used valley. Victory has been sweet today because Pete Schabarum, who dared challenge our crusade for freedom, has been tossed into the ashcan here he will join in oblivion such other Los Angeles elder statesmen as

Willie the Weeping Pickpocket and Little Joe Kroch, the bearded phantom flasher of Pershing Square. May Supervisor Schabarum rest in uncomfortable peace.

We salute those many volunteer heroes who fought so long, with so little, and yet who managed to win so much. The fight has been exhilarating, the victory delicious, but now the war is over and it is time to win the peace. This is not the end. It is a beginning.

What makes today so different from yesterday? Well, to begin with, yesterday our municipal future lay in the calloused hands of a single indifferent, preoccupied proconsul ensconced on a county throne 35 miles away. Today our power resides in the hands of five SCV city councilors. In place of poor distant Mike Antonovich the Santa Clarita Valley voters have now become the restless clients of five next door hometown hustlers who were smart enough and rich enough to cozen your votes. We pay tribute to the big five – Buck McKeon, Jan Heidt, Jo Anne Darcy, Carl Boyer III and Dennis Koontz.

In one sense the birth of our city has been a popularity contest. But from this day forward our quintet of Santa Clarita Valley nabobs will be judged not on their sex appeal, their social graces, their political promises, their back-slapping and baby-kissing – they will be measured by their performance.

We have not bargained for just another two-bit American mini-metropolis, complete with squabbling, personal feuds and backhouse political deals. There is no time left in which to gloat. This is the hour to forgive, if not forget.

The people of the Santa Clarita Valley went to war in an effort to end the sack of their homeland.

Now is the moment for reality and reappraisal. We cannot freeze this valley as a monument to the past. We cannot stop the world in its orbit. When the smoke and dust of the battlefield has settled you will discover that just as the builders and developers need the Santa Clarita Valley, we need the builders. We cannot create an exciting new city without architects, planners and moneymen.

We must not permit our intoxicating flush of victory ever to reduce our city council to thrashing around in a morass of petty arguments over traffic lights and stop signals, barking dogs, parking meters and the design of new shoulder patches for sheriff's deputies.

We must design and build a great new city, annex the rest of the Santa Clarita Valley and save our unincorporated neighbors from the fetters of downtown absentee Los Angeles County government. Finally, above all, we must be gracious in this exuberant hour of victory. There is no room left for selfish vindictiveness. Let us emulate that chivalrous old rumpot, General Ulysses S. Grant, who behaved so generously on

the occasion of the surrender of the Confederate armies at the Appomattox courthouse.

This newspaper urges our new councilmen to forgive the past and allow poor old Pete Schabarum to keep his horses. He will need them for the campaign plowing next spring.

We faced the media's desire for more stories, posed for the cover of *Santa Clarita Valley Magazine*, and listed our New Year's Resolutions for publication in the Winter issue. Of the resolutions I listed, two were the most indicative of my mood. "To forgive the sincere opponents of cityhood; forget about putting parking meters in front of their homes," and "To never forget the 20 candidates not elected to the city council, but who were great winners nonetheless...." Without them we would not have had a city to govern, for in running for the council they had done much to convince their neighbors to vote for incorporation.

On November 8 *The Signal* published an analysis of the campaign spending, revealing that the opposition spent about \$131,000, which was equal to \$6.10 for each one of the registered voters who went to the polls, and \$20.23 for each vote recorded against incorporation. While this seems to be a great deal of money, the stakes for the developers were very high. To Dan Palmer, the expenditure of \$100,000 to protect his half-billion dollar dream must have seemed like pocket change.

In thirty months the city formation committee had spent about \$41,000 in cash and in donated office space and legal services, plus the \$1,000 LAFCO fee and the county's charge to verify petition signatures. Little was spent on the election campaign, the total per voter was \$1.91, and per vote received was \$2.84.

Eleven of the candidates spent more than \$500 during the course of the campaign, as had been reported by Oct. 26:

	Expenditure per voter	Expenditure per vote received
Buck McKeon	\$0.29	\$0.65
Jan Heidt	0.23	0.61
Jo Anne Darcy	0.62	1.79
Carl Boyer	0.05	0.17
Dennis Koontz	0.08	0.28
Richard Vacar	0.50	1.85
Linda Storli	0.10	0.38
Bill Hilton	0.13	1.24
Maurice Ungar	0.11	1.28
Roger Meurer	0.29	3.24
Vern Pera	0.09	1.80

The others had all spent \$500 or less, and so were not obliged to report the details. Both Louis Brathwaite, who came in eighth right behind Linda Storli, and Michael Lyons, who came in ninth, had received more than 3,000 votes, and thus had done extremely well in the ratio of expenditure per voter.

On that same Sunday the *Los Angeles Times* broke down the results of the vote for cityhood by community. Canyon Country, which had benefitted the least

from county planning, had favored cityhood by 72%. In Saugus 73% had voted in favor of self-government, while the vote in Newhall was 69% in favor. Only in Valencia had less than two-thirds of the voters supported local government; the figure was 66.4% in favor. The people of Valencia were the beneficiaries of Newhall Land's master plan. Community identity had not been an issue. The people had understood that each community could retain its own name, as had the San Fernando Valley communities in the City of Los Angeles.

The *Daily News* wrote about development that Sunday. Jack Shine, Dennis Koontz and I were quoted, talking about opening communications, well-planned growth and being heard at the county respectively.

However, while the newspapers analyzed the results it was time for the council-elect to get to work. We began meetings in Buck McKeon's corporate offices. As we did not advertise the meetings they were essentially private until the actual incorporation occurred on December 15. Buck McKeon was confirmed as our first mayor. Jan Heidt was chosen mayor pro-tem, and became responsible for dealing with the questions of hiring a city attorney and city manager, and obtaining insurance. Dennis Koontz was asked to be council liaison to the the committee planning the incorporation ceremonies, which was led by volunteer Mary Spring. One problem was finding a big enough space to hold our first council meeting at a time of holiday celebrations and corporate parties. My tasks included reviewing the ordinances that needed to be adopted, the best date for incorporation, and wildlands fire protection costs. Senator Davis' recent bill was going to save the city \$1,800,000 forestry and fire warden costs.

Meanwhile volunteer Jill Klajic was answering the phone in our City Formation Committee office at 26111 Bouquet Canyon Road. She relished greeting callers with, “City of Santa Clarita.”

The so-called Ordinance No. 1, the catch-all ordinance in which all county ordinances are adopted as city ordinances, was obviously going to be on the agenda. It had to be in place the first night in order for law enforcement and other services to continue seamlessly. However, we were also very concerned about adopting an oak tree ordinance just as quickly. Dorothy Riley had won wide support, and our sympathy, in her campaign to protect the oaks.

We decided quickly that we would act as the Planning Commission for the time being, and that we had to have a myriad of contracts in place with the county. Perhaps more than anything, however, we wanted to get started on the process of obtaining a sphere of influence. On November 11 the lead story in *The Signal* was on the process of annexation.

Shortly after the election, however, we had to face the reality that a lot might happen between the time we voted for cityhood and the time we had it. In the first week six thirty-foot-high billboards went up. The companies building them had gone through the county process. “They're monstrosities,” I said to Pat Aidem, “I was horrified to see them going up, but there's nothing we can do about them because they have permits.” While the county had stopped granting building permits for our valley in September, they had not put a moratorium on

billboards, saying they were a non-discretionary item. We found out that requiring the billboards to come down would mean we would have to pay for them. A tough oak tree ordinance was a different matter, however.¹

We also began work on a bridge loan from TransWorld Bank, believing we might need a few hundred thousand dollars before revenues started coming in. As it turned out, we did not borrow any money during the transition. Gil Callowhill and the City Formation Committee were in close touch with Dick West and the State Board of Equalization. Gil found out that if the city sent someone up to Sacramento with the appropriate papers on December 16, we could start drawing our sales tax monies a quarter earlier than we had anticipated.²

Meanwhile I was getting no respect at San Fernando High School. I had walked into the lunchroom the first day I was back after the election to the sound of hearty applause, but when I passed a copy of *The Signal* around my government class it came back with a mustache adorning my face.³

We soon hired Carmen Sarro as employee No. 1. Carmen was recommended by Jan Heidt, and was an excellent choice. She was the consummate volunteer, bright, and knew everyone. She would be a volunteer for about four weeks before going on the payroll upon incorporation.

We were particularly fortunate in being able to hire E. Fredrick Bien, 65, as our interim city manager. Fred had retired following his being forced to resign as the first manager of the City of Carson, where he had served fourteen years. He had fought to uphold the law, and had been forced out by council member Walter J. "Jake" Egan, who was soon jailed for political corruption. Fred had also served as the first city manager of Norwalk for eleven years, and the interim city manager of Westlake Village, West Hollywood and Agoura Hills immediately after they had incorporated. A graduate of the University of Kansas, he also taught graduate level public administration at Cal State Long Beach.

It was his responsibility to propose an organizational structure, hire and train the first employees, provide a basic financial system and help the city council recruit and select a permanent city manager. Fred was to work for the council-elect at no cost until incorporation, and then for six months at \$7,000 a month. We could spend no money until the incorporation took effect.⁴

As Agoura Hills councilwoman Fran Pavley put it later, "Having someone step in who really knows the ropes was just great. He knows how to start from square one, where you don't have a chair, you don't have a phone."⁵

On November 22 Scott Newhall blasted the council-elect in his editorial, "The Ultimate Aphrodisiac," in which he suggested we were enjoying power too much. The problem was that Dennis Koontz had told reporter Sharon Hormell, "You will not be welcome to our meetings with the County Department heads. Everyone concerned believes it will be for the best for it to be private. That is the way we are going to do it.

"Past articles have made presumptuous statements that were not fair. Based on that experience I feel it justifiable for me to protect myself from that kind of reporting.

“You will have your opportunity when we have no choice but [to] allow you to be present.”

Scott Newhall retorted, “Mr. Koontz’s personal dismay is not even a vaguely acceptable excuse for turning the forthcoming Council-County meetings into the hometown version of a Bolshevik Politbureau cabbage cookoff.”

You should not pick a fight with someone who has more ink than you have.

We selected Carl Newton of the firm of Burke, Williams and Sorenson as our city attorney. He gave us the word that our terms would all expire at one time. I did not relish the possibility of a complete council turnover in April of 1990. As one who was expecting a two and one-half year term I felt free to speak out in favor of longer terms for Buck McKeon and Jan Heidt.⁶

One sad piece of business was that the county continued to process an application for a cogeneration plant in Placerita Canyon. There was one in the canyon already, and it emitted a plume of steam into the atmosphere. We feared that a second one would change the microclimate, and I initiated discussion about moving up the date of incorporation to stop the process. Ruth Benell would have none of it. The permit was granted a week before incorporation by a county which was deliberately going against the collective wishes of our council, who knew nothing about the project except what we could see that plume of steam from anywhere in the valley. Fortunately the second plant was equipped differently, and did not emit such a plume.

While Scott continued to lambaste us for having closed meetings (at the request of county officials), the news columns were at work introducing the council members to the public. Sharon Hormell interviewed us at length and printed what we had to say. I mentioned the time as condominium president that I had been the subject of a Bert Prelutsky story in the *Los Angeles Times’ West* magazine entitled “The Mussolini of Condominium X,” which had made me furious. All I had wanted to do was get swim caps on the heads of longhaired men, whose hair was fouling our filters at tremendous expense. If longhaired women had to wear caps why not the men? It took a couple of years for me to see the humor in that article.

On December 11 Scott let us have it again. This time we had decided that we were going to contract for services from the county pound, but that we would prohibit animals being given out for medical research. It was quite true that Kathleen Ungar had some influence with us, and was editor of a newsletter called *The California Humanitarian for Animals of the Santa Clarita Valley*. The Ungars had campaigned hard for cityhood, and had paid for ads in the paper in favor of incorporation to the extent of \$2,205. Scott raised the issue, would we council members be wearing FOR SALE signs around our necks?

Then we found out from the county that they were having second thoughts about financing road projects through benefit assessment districts. The districts were being established to collect millions of dollars from developers for the building of roads and bridges. This issue was obviously going to take patience and a lot of work.⁷

Dan Hon published a letter to the editor about Pete Schabarum's complaint that the state was bleeding the county dry, and my complaints that the county had been bleeding the Santa Clarita Valley dry. It was obvious to both of us that the state was not doing its job, but even though conservative Pete Schabarum and liberal Assembly Speaker Willie Brown were in agreement, nothing would be done.

Mary Spring had been working quietly while we were taking heat. She organized a big inauguration for our first city council meeting, to be held in the gym at College of the Canyons. Many invitations were sent out, and a bunch of dignitaries were expected to attend. Buck McKeon was quoted, "My feeling talking to Mary Spring is if [Governor] Ronald Reagan called to say he'd be there, she'd say it's too late."⁸

Mary had orchestrated the opening meeting minute by minute, with the loquacious high school Superintendent Clyde Smyth given three minutes as presiding officer to call the meeting to order and oversee the selection of the mayor and mayor pro-tem. We were told that if we wanted our families on stage they would have to come to rehearsal. Our families sat out front.

On December 15, 1987, we did indeed enjoy one heck of a city council meeting. The gymnasium was full with about 2,000 people, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Balloons, flags and poinsettias were used in profusion. There were three bands. Youth groups paraded in from all sides. Melanie Usher, Scott Seamans and Allan Cameron were remarkable as soloists, singing "America," "The Impossible Dream," and leading the audience in "Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand."⁹

Fellow candidate Bill Hilton provided the invocation.

Clyde Smyth announced, "At 4:30 this afternoon we became a city." That was when Ruth Benell filed the necessary papers. I had not even thought about that step, or I would have been there for the filing. With our families called up to stand on the stage behind us, Appellate Court Judge Roger W. Boren, who had been a municipal judge from our valley and prosecutor in the Hillside Strangler case, administered the oaths of office.

Our remarks were mercifully brief. Jo Anne Darcy welcomed the audience to an era of "limitless opportunities." Dennis Koontz asked the audience to "help us do your work," while I asked them to have patience, accept the fact that it would take years to solve some of the problems, and to have the courage to be part of the solutions.

Jan Heidt quoted the Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstein, in saying that while we were amateurs, "We need leaders with the customer's point of view."

After a break, we finished the business of the evening before a smaller crowd of about five hundred. Allan Cameron had advised me that he had heard a developer calling his partner during the recess, telling him to get a crew out in the morning to cut down the oak trees on their property because we were going to pass an ordinance prohibiting that. When I heard this I asked that our agenda be altered. We brought a proposed forty-five day moratorium on cutting down oak

trees up as the first item of business. I moved it, and it passed unanimously as Ordinance No. 1. However, because we did not sign a contract with the Sheriff’s Department the deputies could only enforce ordinances that had been in effect under county government. That gave Fred Bien a job to do, hiking to the property early in the morning through mud and rare snow, accompanied by sheriff’s deputies, to serve the ordinance on a crew of cutters. Then we adopted “Ordinance No. 1,” which made all county laws into city laws (until we took action otherwise) to provide a seamless transition, as the second item of business. The move highlighted the importance of oak trees to the people of our valley.

We also banned temporarily building on land zoned for heavy agricultural use. As Sharon Hormell reported, Jo Anne Darcy “asked directly, ‘What property does this refer to?’

“Newton replied, ‘Property in the A-2 zone.’

“Carl Boyer asked, ‘This would effectively stop any major construction in such a zone?’

“‘Yes it would,’ Newton said.

“Boyer asked, ‘Would it be undesirable to ask what corporation might be inconvenienced by the passage of such a moratorium?’

“No answer from Newton.

“‘Is it not diplomatic to suggest it is directed against a certain project, such as a steam plant?’ Boyer tried again.

“Still Newton provided no explanation, sitting quietly.

“Darcy said the ordinance did not make clear what owners or projects might be affected.

“McKeon cut off the game of Twenty Questions and called for the show of hands.”

It was a difficult situation to be in a setting where we should be open with the public and yet not put ourselves into a position making it easy for us to be sued.

We adjourned to a reception in the main hall at Cal Arts for family and invited dignitaries, including Senator Ed Davis, Assemblywoman Cathie Wright, and Supervisor Mike Antonovich. I was fortunate to have my family present. Daughter Michèle was on break from Tulane Medical School, Denise was home on vacation from her job cruising the Orient as a member of the entertainment crew of the *Royal Viking Star*, and Danielle was still at home.

We did repeal that moratorium the next day, passing a modified one exempting residential and health care uses.

The Signal’s Sharon Hormell described the gymnasium as an appropriate setting for “the ‘slam-dunk’ passage of two moratoriums without public discussion.

“The council also side-stepped, without comment, whether it should sign county service contracts, but voted that county services be continued.

“Discussion among the newly-elected officials and their two-man staff was apparently conducted via secret code of oblique hand signals.”

With Sharon doing a great job of editorializing in the news columns, Scott took a holiday. Under the heading, “Need Help? Call 259-1234” (which is *The Signal’s* phone number), he wrote, “Today we are delighted and honored to salute the new Santa Clarita City Council.... May they prosper and somehow manage to survive the long road ahead through the storms that rage on the fruited plains of democracy.

“Some of our readers may recall that in the past few issues the comments expressed in these editorial paragraphs have not been of an exclusively laudatory flavor. Therefore, today we propose to stop carping and participate in the euphoria that has settled over the Santa Clarita Valley. We shall abandon journalistic intemperance for the next few issues and provide our leaders a chance to catch their breaths and gather in the firewood for a long and cold winter.” Nonetheless, he was willing to offer us his advice – we only had to call him at 259-1234 during business hours.

We welcomed the respite, which stopped short of nagging, and allowed us to consider the justified complaints.

The next night we held a council meeting in the auditorium at Hart High School before an audience of about sixty-five. At this meeting a building permit review was on the agenda for adoption. Dennis Koontz and I opposed it as a disguised moratorium. Dennis seemed to be pro-growth and I was the only council member who had been a member of the committee that had promised there would be no building moratorium. Action was postponed on that, but I did vote with the majority for a moratorium on billboards.¹⁰

Meanwhile the public was learning of a new organization. The Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment was represented by Allan Cameron, who spoke in favor of reviewing development projects. Growth was a major concern. When the County’s Regional Planning Commission began to consider population projections for the year 2010, the number under consideration was more than 270,000. I spoke for the vast majority when I said, “Many people in the area are afraid that if they do include the new figures, that it’s very conceivable that they will unleash a new run on building without any consideration to infrastructure. Our infrastructure is already taxed to its limits.”

Dennis Koontz added, “Growth is going to happen whether we want it or not, but people are afraid that the projected population figures are going to become a target the county is going to try to meet.”¹¹

Norman Murdoch, the county’s Planning Director, said that “the projections are neither pro-growth nor anti-growth. They are just population figures and they will provide guidelines for many agencies for long-range planning. People are going to have to recognize that the figures do not have any direct impact on anything. They are just a recognition of what is going to probably happen. If we don’t recognize that, then we can’t plan for it.”

The problem with Murdoch’s position was that we were a large city, in the top five per cent of California cities by population, trapped in a county larger than forty-three of our states and sixty per cent of the countries of the world, passing

itself off as local government, and making estimates which would not really have any impact.

It is true that growth happens whether people want it or not, and that a great deal of Santa Clarita’s growth was created at home. In spite of any city’s best efforts to contain growth, if housing is not built the existing homes will become more crowded. A city can work to maintain standards, and pass ordinances about overcrowding, but ultimately they will become impossible to enforce properly. As population grows more people stay home with their parents, or families let out rooms because rents are high and the extra income is tempting. The sewers and the streets become overloaded and the playgrounds become crammed with portable classrooms.

With crowding the crime rate increases. Due to the lack of parking places more cars are parked on front lawns. People concerned with the appearance of their neighborhood decide to sell out, to take the money and run.

Those less concerned with aesthetics, noise or other issues, or who cannot afford to run, buy the housing, and then rent more rooms to deal with the burden of mortgage payments. New suburbs are built to house those fleeing the old suburbs, but taxes and fees are high because it is more expensive to build new schools rather than to maintain old ones, and there is a need for more roads, sewers, street lights and other public infrastructure. The utilities become strained, and rates go up. Many oldtimers in the Santa Clarita Valley can attest to the high number of electric and water outages when the systems were growing out from the centers and there was no grid of lines or pipes allowing power or water to be sent by any alternate route.

Meanwhile the old suburbs were filling up with a huge influx of people from all over the world, from Central America, Armenia and other places. The solution to this migration is to help other countries to become places in which people want to stay, but the same people who flee the inner suburbs are often the ones who want nothing to do with supporting foreign aid. Polls show that average Americans believe that we spend a large proportion of our tax dollar on foreign aid. They have no idea that most foreign aid is military aid to a very few countries, or that the annual total spent is but a tiny fraction of one per cent of the wealth we produce annually.

LAFCO had forced us to be the hole in the donut. We were forty square miles in a large valley that the county was saying would grow, and we were being denied any meaningful voice in this growth. This would allow developers to play the city against the county. The builders could buy land in the city or the county territory, and work with either the city or the county planners. If the city held to higher standards, which it always did, the developers could build in the county, leaving Santa Clarita as the hole in the donut. The population from the county territory would flood our roads and our schools, and we would have no growth to assist us to build the infrastructure we needed.

Of course the developers wanted to be in the county unincorporated area, where they could deal with the planning staff which felt little pressure from anti-

growth or environmental groups. The county politicians were immune from public pressure. It could take a couple of million dollars to run a credible race for Supervisor, and the developers provided the money to the incumbents, who had learned from staff that growth was inevitable and had to be anticipated. People who understood the system did not believe that the Supervisors were “on the take,” but the developers contributed campaign funds to those they knew, and had access as a result. A city mayor cannot get through to a Supervisor on the phone quickly, but a developer can.

Population projections, developed by the counties, are used to establish policy. Congress, and various officials in the Federal government, use them, and cite local sources in justifying this. The Southern California Association of Governments, or SCAG, is a powerful but little-known agency which seems to be outside the control of its member cities and counties. Its professional staff oversees a huge area. Its board of directors is composed of elected officials who run for the job from various areas. However, it is difficult to recruit council members and supervisors to run. The burden of attending SCAG board meetings, on top of all the other service a local official is expected to provide, is great, considering the fact that most locally elected people have to work full time to make a living.

A local council member can put in forty hours a week and still hold down a full time job as long as the forty additional hours typically spent as a council member are flexible time. SCAG meetings are held during the day, as are most other meetings of regional groups, such as those that deal with sewers and sanitation. Therefore only some council members can run for the board of SCAG, or LAFCO. Those who do not have an established business, unless they are retired, cannot attend the meetings, even though most of the positions are allowed some meeting fees and expenses.

Eight days after incorporation Sharon Hormell’s story, “Is Controversial ‘Deal’ Really Legitimate?” ran in *The Signal*.

The baby was conceived in Jack Boyer’s car.

Its features took shape in a confusing mix of county officials’ and city backers’ ideas.

The Local Agency Formation Commission and Board of Supervisors delivered it onto the ballot.

Voters wholeheartedly adopted it.

The new Santa Clarita City Council must now decide whether to accept full care of an infant of uncertain parentage or to ask the county for child support.

A stack of contracts for county services remains unsigned while the council decides if it will pay the estimated \$2.7 million cost of the services, or renege on a deal struck by the city formation committee and the county.

The city backers are divided over the question, which serious questions of ethics and precedent.

While some insist that the city honor the committee’s agreement to pay, others say the formation committee’s agreement was not binding on the council and was intended only to appease county Supervisors into approving an early election.

“I think the feeling was, if that’s what it took, we’d say ‘sure,’ and we’d let the city and county go at it afterward,” said city formation committee member Jack Boyer (who is no relation to Council member Carl Boyer).

City formation committee member Bob Lathrop, who became a full voting member of the committee after the cityhood issue was already on the ballot, said, “The city should stick to the deal.”

Not only would a legal fight cost the new city money it could spend on roads and parks, but he feared it could cost the city its hard-won fight to incorporate.

“LAFCO made provisions for the incorporation of the city, and those were voted on by the people,” he said. “If we can challenge those provisions (partially), maybe they can challenge the whole thing and throw it out.

“I don’t think you can pick and chose what you want to keep,” said Lathrop.

No longer in question is who first suggested the agreement and why.

“The idea originated in (committee member) Jack Boyer’s car on the way downtown to meet with Supervisor Ed Edelman,” said committee member Allan Cameron.

With Boyer were Cameron and city formation committee vice-chairman Connie Worden.

It was a tense drive, and the three were brainstorming a strategy to convince the Supervisors to approve a November cityhood election.

County officials protested that a November election would cost the deficit-ridden county too much money because state law required counties to provide services to new cities through the June following incorporation.

The Supervisors had already threatened to delay the election until April, with incorporation put off until June.

With those delays, the new city would be responsible to provide complete services immediately, without the six-month cushion of income to pay for them, nor experience in office to direct the city’s policies.

Sharon’s article went on to explain how the idea progressed to being on the ballot, and that the committee, including Jill Klajic and Gil Callowhill, who sat in on later meetings with county staff, which included Jo Anne Darcy, was overwhelmed.

“They were trying to blackmail us,” Jack Boyer said, “saying that we had to pay back all the sales taxes and...for the services also.

“They were throwing around million-dollar figures like they were coming off a duck’s back.”

During the meeting Jack Boyer called Charles Vose, the committee’s attorney *pro bono*, who said that the committee could not bind the city to anything.

After committee members agreed to the deal somewhat later, LAFCO took the sales tax provision out, making the agreement considerably more equitable.

Bob Lathrop insisted the city honor the agreement, and asked the Council to seek an independent legal opinion. I supported his view. I felt that in the long term, the reputation of the city was paramount.

Scott Newhall used this story as the basis for his editorial, “Gossip from the Men’s Room.” Reneging on his promise to lay off the council for a little while, he wrote of gossip “sweeping through the Santa Clarita Valley latrines” that the council was meeting secretly to talk about taking the county to court. Accusing the council of being “improper and reckless,” he reviewed the background of such “odious litigation,” saying that the people were “indubitably determined to build a fine city, not just another squalid urban jungle, administered by a clutch of artful dodgers.” The committee had made the bargain, and the Council should stick to it. “Ladies and gentlemen do not waltz on their moral obligations.”

Carmen Ramos Chandler, who followed us from time to time for the *Daily News*, explained our point of view in some detail. The “fight” over payment was over a clause that we wanted to insert into the contracts to retain our rights. City attorney Carl Newton explained the clause that we proposed. “We would go ahead and enter into the agreement, recognizing that we have a disagreement over the requirement that the city pay for services and that we will seek to resolve the disagreement in the future, either through future agreements or in court.”

It was the Supervisors who had accused us of reneging.¹²

Almost fifteen years later I called Jack Boyer, who was living in retirement in the Temecula area, and asked him if he remembered the story. “Oh, yes! I cut it out and had it Permaplaqued!” He took it down off the wall while we talked. He filled in a few details. The car was his big black Lincoln. In the back seat were Allan Cameron and Gil Callowhill. Connie Worden was in the front.

When they called Casey Vose, Jack spoke to the attorney, whom he had recruited for *pro bono* services as a result of their serving together on the civic center board created during the process of building the Santa Clarita Valley Civic Center on a lease-back arrangement. He was in one of the old wood phone booths at the Hall of Administration, the door open, with the committee leaning in to hear what was said.

The committee members were afraid they could not keep up the momentum if the Board of Supervisors postponed the incorporation election from November to June. Exhaustion prevailed. A June election would result in the city being liable for all services from July 1, not a happy prospect. In spite of wanting to make an agreement they were concerned about what could happen if they agreed to bind a non-existent city and a city council not yet elected to an agreement.

Further, would they be personally liable? Casey’s advice was, “They can’t do anything to you. I’d go for it.”

Ultimately we agreed to pay Los Angeles County the money, and did so under very favorable negotiated terms over a period of five years. At the time we thought the payment, which had been extorted from us, would really hurt. However, incorporating earlier, in December rather than June, proved to be quite profitable and well worth the deal. Not only did we contain some measure of control over planning and zoning that much earlier, but we also came into control of our own revenues more quickly, and in a year enjoyed having a bank account containing several times the total amount we had to pay the county.

Eventually I developed sympathy for the county point of view. We were indeed “the largest newly incorporated city in the history of humankind.” Had we been the typical small city the county would not have felt the cost of providing services at the same time we were raking in the revenue. However, the county was strapped, and the historically irresponsible handling of county funding by the state legislature did not help. Unfortunately, this continued to be an issue many years later.¹³

Then Elsmere Canyon was added to our plate. The City of Los Angeles was asking for a sphere of influence over this wild country between us. We had heard about plans to make Elsmere into a dump when Ruth Benell had sliced any thought of including territory east of the Antelope Valley Freeway and south of San Fernando Road out of our application for incorporation. Now Los Angeles councilman Hal Bernson wanted to take control, even though the canyon was in our watershed. We got set to oppose Los Angeles’ application.

It had been a tough year. We had won a tough battle, and had let Pete keep his horses. However, Sharon Hormell opened her story on January 1, 1988, with, “The war against the world outside the SCV continues.”

¹*Daily News*, Nov. 15, 1987.

²*The Signal*, Nov. 13, 1987.

³*The Signal*, Nov. 18, 1987, Mimi’s gossip column.

⁴*The Signal*, Nov. 20, 1987.

⁵*Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 28, 1987.

⁶*Daily News*, Nov. 26, 1987.

⁷*The Signal*, Dec. 11, 1987.

⁸*Daily News*, Dec. 13, 1987.

⁹*Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 16, 1987.

¹⁰*The Signal*, Dec. 18, 1987.

¹¹*The Signal*, Dec. 23, 1987.

¹²*Daily News*, Dec. 27, 1987.

¹³Dan Walters, “National Survey Underscores Poor Status of Counties,” *The Signal*, Feb. 25, 2002.