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SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. B01**LENGTH:** 1028 words**HEADLINE:** Rural island;**As developments** nears Vista Santa Rosa, residents fear for their paradise**BYLINE:** BARBARA E. HERNANDEZ; THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE**BODY:**

Vista Santa Rosa is only minutes from central La Quinta, but many residents consider the unincorporated community a rural paradise

Horses, cattle and goats graze on green grass, and the land is dotted with date and olive orchards, vineyards and vegetables. It's a trip back in time to an era when country living was king in the Coachella Valley.

But the time for farming and ranching may be over, residents say. Now their 20-square-mile community - sandwiched between La Quinta and Coachella - is seen more as a ripe investment by land developers and eyed by adjacent cities as a potential candidate for annexation.

While some residents have been working to keep the community unincorporated to preserve its rural character, more than a dozen others have written to La Quinta officials requesting to be part of that city. Other landowners and developers are asking to be placed under Coachella's control in hopes of gaining necessary improvements to their land.

Ellen Lloyd Trover, 56, a retired lawyer, grew up in Thermal and owns 40 acres in Vista Santa Rosa, where she farms dates, eggplant and other vegetables.

"Developers and speculators buy our farmland and don't want to farm," Trover said. "We have got to find some way to co-exist."

"You need to make development compatible," said Betty Talley, 68, a Thermal native. "You don't want a housing development right next to a vineyard fence. A grape grower needs to spray his crops."

'Not a happy scenario'

Keeping livestock and horses would be unlikely within city limits, said Denys Arcuri, legislative assistant for 4th District Supervisor Roy Wilson.

Arcuri said Vista Santa Rosa offers a rare wide-open, rural environment, a natural antidote to the gated, country-club atmosphere. Developers may see that as the area's most competitive edge, he said.

"But if we're not careful (with development), we'll chase every landowner into the cities, and that's not a happy scenario," he said.

Trover said she and her group, the Vista Santa Rosa Association, have voiced opposition to being annexed by any of the adjacent cities, La Quinta, Indio and Coachella. She wants her land to remain under county control.

Vista Santa Rosa is generally bounded on the north by Avenues 50 and 52, on the east by Harrison and Van Buren streets, on the south by Avenue 66 and on the west by Monroe Street.

While some have written to La Quinta requesting annexation, Mayor Don Adolph said the city is not interested in making it part of the city at this time. "We're not out promoting or gobbling up the area," he said. "If they want to be in the city of La Quinta, there's a process they have to go through."

The process involves the Riverside County Local Agency Formation Commission, an application and an official release from the city of Coachella. Vista Santa Rosa is in Coachella's sphere of influence, said LAFCO Executive Officer George Spiliotis.

Spiliotis said there are no pending applications for annexation by Indio, La Quinta or Coachella.

"There's probably interest in all three cities about the area," Spiliotis said. "But there have been no residents specifically requesting annexation in Indio."

La Quinta Councilwoman Terry Henderson said the city has been interested in Vista Santa Rosa for a few years and is now investigating the logistics of annexing the area.

However, Adolph said the city would not annex the area until it already had improvements, such as sewers and storm drains.

"I have told them, I don't know how many times, they have to provide their own services," Adolph said. "Vista Santa Rosa is not going to burden the citizens of La Quinta and have us spend our money to fix up their sewers, water and streets."
'One parcel at a time'

Despite the recent series of letters to La Quinta, Spiliotis said most residents and landowners who contact his office seemed to prefer Coachella to La Quinta, he said.

Coachella Councilman Juan DeLara said Coachella has no plans to annex the area at this time.

"We're not looking at a big land grab or huge annexation project," he said. "We're taking it one parcel at a time and helping those folks that want to come into our city."

"Those who are most vocal do not want to be annexed," he said. "But in many eyes and minds, Coachella has a negative stigma. La Quinta's glamorous. They don't have a lot of the challenges we have."

According to the Riverside County General Plan, the area of Vista Santa Rosa would retain its rural flavor. The county blueprint allows no more than three homes on an acre.

Regardless of the county measures in place, many feel that development and annexation will come.

"Eventually the forces of urbanization, cruel to say, are probably going to get them," said Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont-McKenna College. "With any development there will be more demands for police protection, curbs and gutters."

Frates said in areas where suburbia rubs against rural areas, it always leaves a mark. New homeowners don't want the smell of horses or livestock and would likely petition the county to get rid of the area's ranches and farms.

Many residents are hoping for a new general plan with more detailed planning for the area.

"It's important for the county to develop guidelines or standards for the area so property owners have a clear picture of what they can and cannot do," said resident David Limsn Saldivar, who has lived in the area since 1993.

Gayle Cady, 58, moved to Vista Santa Rosa in 1980, when it was known only as Thermal. She shares her ranch with six horses, three dogs, 20 chickens, 12 rabbits, a bull and heifer.

"I moved here for the ambience of rural open space, the beauty of the ranch fragrance," she said. "Not for the urban congestion."

Cady said she's been watching the country clubs being built closer and closer to Vista Santa Rosa.

"We don't encroach on the country clubs, but now they're encroaching on us," Cady said.

NOTES:

ALSO RAN 4/14/04 SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY.

GRAPHIC: RODRIGO PENA / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE / (1) Vista Santa Rosa resident Ellen Lloyd Trover says annexation could bring unwanted changes. (2) C.J. Lequerica trains a horse at Deer Creek in the Vista Santa Rosa area, which is being eyed by developers and annexation advocates.; PHOTOS ; MAP

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