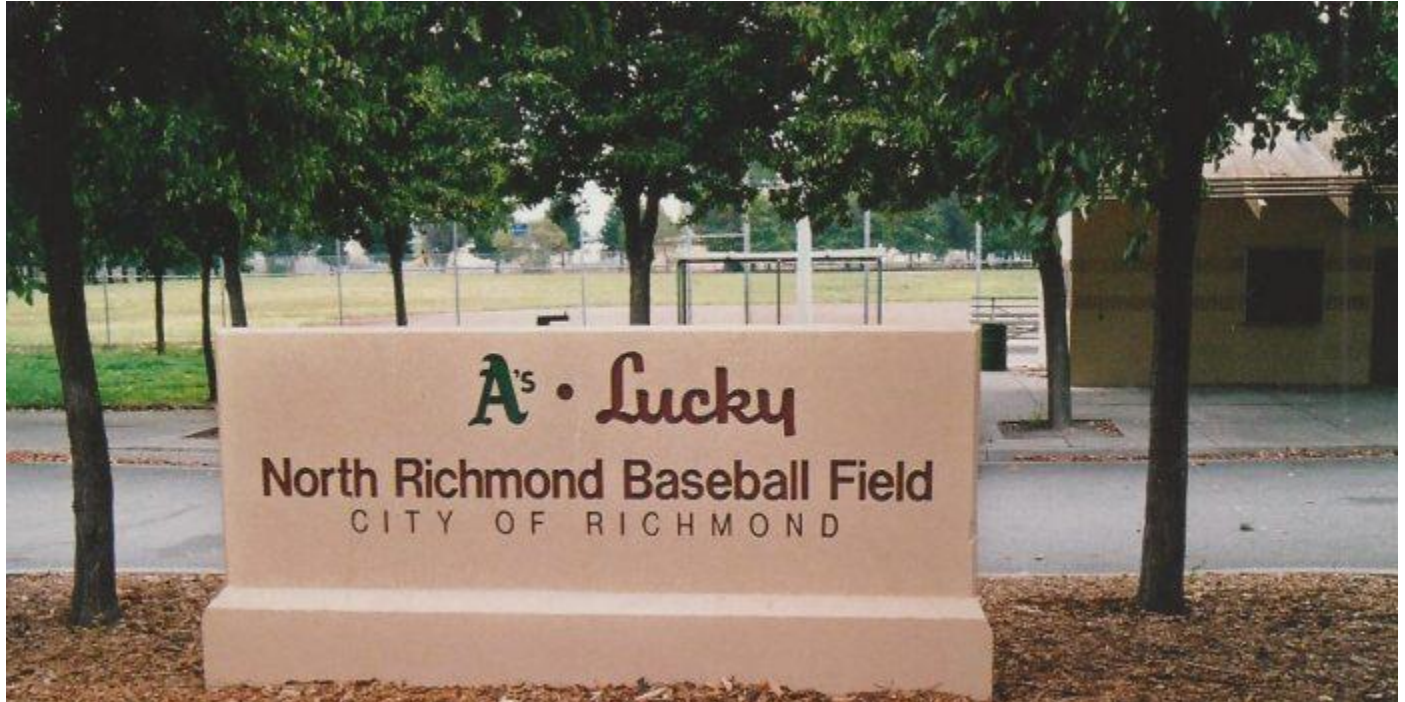


Richmond council proceeds tentatively on North Richmond annexation

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The Richmond City Council voted in favor Tuesday of moving forward with the state application to annex unincorporated North Richmond, but not without simultaneously voting to conduct extensive outreach and polling of North Richmond residents which, depending on the results, could end up derailing annexation.

In a 5-2 vote — with Councilmembers Eduardo Martinez and Jovanka Beckles voting against — the council agreed to launch the application process with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), a preliminary step toward annexation.

However, the council also voted to conduct public outreach and surveys in North Richmond to ensure residents and property owners have an educated voice on whether to incorporate the area of roughly 3,700 residents — which is almost completely surrounded by Richmond. For decades, the area has received public services from the county.

If the results of forthcoming polling reveal that a majority of North Richmond residents oppose annexation, council would move to nix the LAFCO application, Councilman Jael Myrick noted Tuesday.

Richmond Mayor Tom Butt, a longtime supporter of annexation, expressed concern about the effectiveness of an informal survey, saying he doubted it would reach an adequate number of North Richmond residents.

Influential locals supporting North Richmond's annexation include Contra Costa County Board of Supervisor John Gioia and famous local historian Betty Reid Soskin, the nation's oldest working National Park Service ranger.

Supporters say annexation would correct a decades-old injustice for crime-ridden North Richmond, pointing to [historical accounts](#) since WWII times that the area remained unincorporated, unwanted and ignored largely because of its historically poor, nearly all-block populace.

In recent weeks, Mayor Butt penned an opinion piece highlighting these historical accounts, as did Soskin and Gioia. Meanwhile, the annexation proposal has led to heated online debates among political factions, community leaders and residents.

Few North Richmond residents have come out in support of annexation, partly due to an independent financial audit that found their annual bills would increase under Richmond's jurisdiction. They would pay a higher real property tax, higher real estate transfer tax and a utility tax they don't currently pay to

the county, among other fees. See a breakdown of the financial analysis for annexation [here](#).

Some politically active North Richmond residents see annexation as a land grab by Richmond elites that will ultimately lead to gentrification.

At Tuesday's council meeting, Gioia emphasized the importance of North Richmond residents having a voice in the annexation decision. In the longterm, Gioia said, North Richmond residents would benefit from becoming part of Richmond despite the increase in annual costs.

A majority of North Richmond's residents are renters who will benefit from Richmond's rent control laws, which don't exist in the county, Gioia argued. Richmond and North Richmond would likely become safer, Gioia added, by having a more streamlined law enforcement system with the Richmond Police Department taking over for the sheriff.

The supervisor also believes North Richmond residents would have improved public works and planning services under Richmond's jurisdiction, as well as a voice in Richmond city elections and planning decisions.

"I believe that North Richmond has a chance to advance the improvements we've collectively made by becoming part of the City, instead of remaining an isolated unincorporated pocket totally surrounded by the City of Richmond," Gioia said. "But, let me also stress — I strongly believe that the residents of North Richmond should have a strong voice in this decision. Those who do not live in North Richmond should not be making the decision for them since they will be the ones who will live with this decision."

The LAFCO application process also includes public vetting. LAFCO has the ability to either approve the city's application, modify it or deny it. If approved, possible objections by residents would lead to a protest hearing.

If less than 25-percent of registered voters or landowners disagree with annexation, LAFCO would still confirm annexation. If between 25 percent and 50 percent of landowners or registered voters are opposed, then there will be an election. If over 50-percent of landowners and registered voters oppose, then annexation is terminated.