

Council approves dual-track approach to North Richmond annexation

Richmond will apply to the Local Agency Formation Commission to annex North Richmond and simultaneously seek residents' feedback



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PUBLISHED: October 19, 2017 at 2:41 pm | UPDATED: October 19, 2017 at 2:44 pm

RICHMOND — The City Council this week gave the go-ahead to launch the process of annexing North Richmond, and simultaneously conduct public outreach to gauge the unincorporated enclave's support for such a move.

There has been broad consensus among officials that North Richmond becoming part of Richmond could remedy a shameful piece of history. The unincorporated community, sandwiched between San Pablo and its namesake Bay, but surrounded entirely by the city of Richmond, resulted from World War II-era housing restrictions on African-Americans. Later, Richmond annexed the Hilltop area, making it contiguous to the rest of the city via a thin strip of land between the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks, while bypassing North Richmond.

Officials also broadly agreed that North Richmond residents would likely get better services, among them law enforcement, by being represented at Richmond City Hall rather than at the more distant county seat of Martinez. On the downside, North Richmond's property taxes would go up under annexation, as would the real estate transfer tax. Residents also would become subject to the city's utility tax.

But officials differed on how to time and prioritize various steps toward possible annexation. On Tuesday, the council voted to get the ball rolling by approving an

annexation application to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), a regional agency that oversees expansion or dissolution of cities and local governments.

The council voted to send a mailing to North Richmond residents that includes answers to frequently asked questions about annexation, and an informal ballot asking residents whether they are for or against annexation.

Vice Mayor Jovanka Beckles and Councilman Eduardo Martinez voted no. Beckles had argued that filing an application with LAFCO before consulting North Richmond residents is doing things in the wrong order.

Councilman Jael Myrick, who made the motion that the council eventually adopted, argued that postponing the LAFCO application process could result in annexation occurring shortly after the next general election, in November 2018, depriving North Richmond voters of a voice at a crucial time.

Among those who recommended the dual-track approach was Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, who also spoke at Tuesday's meeting.

According to a city staff report, unincorporated North Richmond is about 900 acres in area, and land use consists of a mix of residential, industrial and commercial, as well as some open space. The 2010 U.S. Census reported a population of 3,717.