

Chapter 1

“UP WITH SOREHEADS!”

My real concern about government was born on December 18, 1966, the day my wife Chris and I moved into the Del Prado condominium in Newhall. There is nothing like home ownership to make people think about the quality of local services. We had expected to close escrow that day. We should have been nervous, for we had sunk every penny we had, as well as some money borrowed from a finance company, into making the deal. However, salesman Gene Goldberg had given us no inkling of any difficulties, and we were blissfully unaware that Portrait Homes was a shell corporation that did not have clear title to the property on which they had built.

When we did not close on time I began talking with our few neighbors and the offices of Portrait Homes. I found out why we could not close escrow, but the neighbors were not particularly concerned. The prevailing attitude of the residents was that if they could not close they would not pay anything more, and by the time they were evicted they would have received good value for their \$500 down payment. There was no way I wanted to have my name in the courts, or any stigma on my credit record.

Something had to be done. My neighbors were more than willing to let me do the legwork, and ask questions. They gave me their moral support even though I was the youngest and most inexperienced person in the development. A number of things happened in succession. We were all served with a lawsuit. I negotiated a rental agreement that would allow each of us to pay rent reflecting what would have been the net cost of our mortgage payments after credit for tax deductions and principal payments. We closed escrow nine weeks late. The builders appointed me to the Board of Directors to represent the few units that had been purchased.

I wound up as the president of the board. I knew I was window dressing for the homebuyers, but the position gave me easy access to a lot of records. Having no experience in such things, I started in on the paperwork, reading everything I could, including the titles, the Codes, Covenants and Restrictions, and anything else I could find. I poured over the budget and the bills. Over a period of years a lot happened. As we were in a recession, and condominiums were a new idea to the area, sales were slow and Portrait Homes went bankrupt; Lytton Savings foreclosed on Harlan Lee and Byron Lasky, the individuals who owned the shell.

Then Bart Lytton ran into financial trouble and his holdings were taken over by Great Western Savings. Del Prado remained unfinished for a while, and then when the buildings were finally done the landscaping was not what we had been led to expect. Then we began to get big bills for greenbelt lighting from Southern California Edison, and had difficulty getting our checklists done.

When we buyers complained about these problems Lytton's response was to give each of us a letter saying we could move out and they would make us whole,

paying us back what we had put into our homes. Then they cut the price of the units by \$4,000 each, from \$26,000 to \$22,000 in the case of the largest units. I negotiated a \$4,000 rebate on each of our mortgages, and we all stayed. A united voice proved to be important. I went to work on the title, double checking the property lines, and found that part of our property had been fenced away from the rest. We reclaimed it.

Board member Thomas J. Davis, an attorney, led negotiations with Southern California Edison and the county that led to having our greenbelt lighting bill taken over by the Newhall Lighting District, to which we paid taxes anyway. Our argument was that condominiums ought to get credit for the fact that they have fewer public streets to keep repaired, and so should benefit more from the lighting district.

We did not get tax bills for a while. Los Angeles County was a couple of years behind in listing new owners on the tax rolls, and we had to ask Byron Lasky, who was working for Lytton as a consultant, for our bills. The first bill was very low, reflecting the unimproved value of the land even though we had closed escrow before the March 1 reassessment date.

The next bill was a shock. We were making first mortgage monthly payments of \$102 on our residence and the tax bill was \$606.70 per year. Even though our units had been reduced in price the assessments had been computed on the original purchases. Unit 46, which Chris and I owned, was assessed on a market value of \$23,200, which was \$1,200 more than our purchase price after rebate, and reflected the original purchase agreement less the value of landscaping and the like, as was usually the case. Since the prices had been dropped before the assessment deadline it was obvious someone was not on top of things. In 1967 the tax rate for our area was \$10.2124 per \$100 of assessed valuation. Since the assessed valuation was supposed to be 25% of the market value the actual rate was a little over 2.5% of the total value of our property, as opposed to the one per cent limit (plus some allowances for bonds) imposed by Proposition 13 a decade later.

Doing the math was neither fun nor stimulating. The county rate was 2.4587. The schools totaled 5.2636 for the elementary, high school and junior college districts. Special districts, including Road District #5, Flood Control, Sewer Maintenance, the Sanitation District, water agencies, fire protection and "other," which including lighting and library rates, totaled 2.4901. I had little idea what all this meant, but the special districts were the agencies about which no one knew anything, and would ultimately become the focus of studies about financing a city.

The neighbors grumbled, but the popular feeling was "we cannot fight city hall." I called the Tax Assessor's office and Great Western Savings (which had taken over Lytton), and found that we could appeal the assessments if we presented our case with unanimity. I would be allowed to represent the homeowners if I went into the process with signed authorizations from each. Great Western officials said they would join us in the appeal.

I canvassed the neighborhood and explained the situation. Most of my neighbors were willing to sign. Four refusals during the first round did not deter me, and after making the rounds several times I finally found everyone at home. With the signed authorizations in hand I went back to visit with the four families who had refused, gently telling them that if they did not sign I could not do the appeal, and that I would have to tell the entire neighborhood why. They all signed.

Taking a day off work, driving the thirty-two miles to downtown Los Angeles, the seat of our “local” government, and paying the outrageous parking fees, I went to appeal our assessments. However, no representative from Great Western was there, and while I was allowed to present our case the appeal was turned down because we were not all represented at once. However, the staff member who had presented the county’s case to the appeals board said that he believed we deserved some consideration, and that the staff would revisit our assessments. While it took two years for the bill to reflect a reduction in the assessment, the one for our unit went down to \$20,800. In 1969, while the rates totaled a significantly higher 12.0067 (or more than 3% of the market value), the taxes went down to \$543.39, in part because the small personal property tax was no longer being collected.

After the hearing I called Great Western and was told that they had made their own appointment to present the appeal and had been turned down the week before, because we were not there. I let them know we would have been if we had known what they were doing.

I began to understand how little the County of Los Angeles knew about the northern sixty per cent of their territory. I received notice of the Los Angeles Unified School District board election for April 1967. It said that Chris and I, as voters in Newhall precinct 1, should vote in the polling place on Olden Street. Not knowing where that was, I asked at the offices of *The Newhall Signal*. They directed me to Sylmar, a community across the pass in the San Fernando Valley. I took my right to vote seriously, and drove the ten miles to the polls, where I was told I was the only person from Newhall precinct 1 to vote that day. I told that to the paper, which ran a story saying that the election officials said I had been sent the sample ballot in error and that if I showed up at the polls I would not be allowed to vote. Of course I had voted already.

Zoning was another cause for discontent. One Friday, on my return home from San Fernando High School, Chris told me that neighbor Helene Grandahl was trying to reach me. I called Helene right away.

“Carl, one of my friends saw a legal notice in *The Newhall Signal*. The land across Avenida Dorena is up for a zoning change and we never got any notice.”

Helene and I drove the thirty-two miles to the Regional Planning Commission after a long distance call to our “local” government revealed that there was a need to go. We had just a few minutes before the office closed at 5:00 to take a look at the file. Lee, Lasky and their bankers had filed for a zone change on land which was supposed to be a part of Del Prado, and wanted to put

an automobile body shop across Avenida Dorena, a narrow residential street intended for access to our community. None of us, who had been owners for more than a year, were listed as owning property within three hundred feet, and thus entitled to notice of the zone change hearing.

We had already signed away our rights to 530/660ths of the original Del Prado, and had accepted ownership of 130th of the remaining area. Now we knew why. In return for a bigger share of our clubhouse we had given up any control we might have had over the bulk of the original project. Now the successors to Portrait Homes were taking advantage of a legal loophole, which allowed them to have an outside company list all the property owners within three hundred feet. They were pretending not to know that the list was years out-of-date.

I attended the hearing the following Tuesday to enter our protest. It did little good. The Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission passed the property owner's proposal. At that time the opposition was allowed to appeal an RPC decision to the Board of Supervisors without having to pay a fee. We appealed. Thirty-five from Del Prado went to protest before the Board of Supervisors, but Supervisor Warren Dorn moved approval of the issue, which we could not find on the agenda, by zoning case number 5246 with no title and no discussion. Before we figured out what was happening the zone change had been approved unanimously.

We were furious. I went to the newspaper to complain, making the mistake of thinking that Lionel Rolfe, who at that time was putting out the weekly almost without help, would quote me accurately. Instead he had me saying, "We're going to run a write-in candidate against Warren M. Dorn just to let the bastard know what we think of him." I had said indeed we would run a write-in candidate, but had not engaged in name calling, which I thought was inappropriate. Sadly, we found out that a write-in campaign was impossible under a new law.¹

Ultimately that property went through a number of owners and the zone change became less of a problem as we negotiated to give support to the projects as long as there would be a buffer zone between Del Prado and commercial zoning. Finally the firm of Bollenbacher and Kelton came to me and asked me what I wanted. I suggested single family housing on most of the property, with some condominiums next to Del Prado, and happily supported that proposal before the Planning Commission. Years later, we bought second hand a home built on that part of the original Del Prado.

It had been a hard couple of years from the time in December 1966 that we moved in to our home. I was defeated in a bid for reelection to the board by unhappy homeowners, and then talked into running again a year later. It seemed that the new board had looked over the records and decided that I would be a good board member after all. After a second term as president I was booted off again as the result of rumors spread by the resident manager. Then I was put back on after agreeing to run as a result of one drink too many made me agreeable at

our New Year’s Eve party in our clubhouse at. Ultimately I served three terms as president, and brief stints as treasurer, secretary, vice president and, for a few weeks to give us time to fill the position, as manager.

When I left the board for keeps Chris ran for the board, and soon wound up as president.

I was primed to agree with an editorial in *The Signal* (which had expanded to publishing three times a week) of March 7, 1969 by Jon Newhall.²

We Must Incorporate

We mentioned the subject of incorporation – that of forming our very own city – in this space on Monday, and we feel it is important enough to compell [*sic*] us to review the matter again today.

This newspaper quite frankly believes that we must get together at once to form our city. Unless something is done very soon, we are going to continue to become a more mis-zoned, and ill-cared for crossroads, ignored by our county officials to the south.

Our houses and roads are sliding in the rains, yet the tax rates we are paying are the highest in the county, if not in the entire state.

Yet, what do we have to show for all of this? There is no local civic center here yet; very few of the county departments are represented within the confines of this valley; and, as a matter of fact, just to talk to our elected “leaders” requires at minimum a long distance toll call.

It is time for the people of this valley to take the decision power which governs their destinies out of sad [*sic*] hands of the Board of Supervisors, who are effectively and methodically masterplanning the ruination of this valley.

We must form our own city council, collect our own tax monies, chose [*sic*] our own priorities and get about the task of building our own city.

We call on the people of this valley to unite in an effort to undertake this challenging task. We look to the Chambers of Commerce – or any other civic group – to form a specific committee to study this exciting concept.

Let us do something before it is too late.

I called Jon Newhall and asked who was the chairman of the incorporation effort. He said, “You are.” The fact that as far as I knew he did not know me from Adam should have been a warning not to get involved, but we had a condominium board meeting that night and I took the issue to the board. This led to passage of a resolution for board president Thomas J. Davis, a Sherman Oaks attorney, and me to take to the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia Chamber of Commerce. On March 12, 1969, *The Signal* ran a story about the procedure for incorporating a city, and that was the first time I had heard about LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation Commission. The next morning, as we went to the Chamber meeting, the story appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. Tom Davis had been talking to Kenneth J. Fanucchi.

I gave a brief talk to the Chamber board and they referred it to the Joint Progress Committee, of which Harold "Harry" Bell was chairman. This would bring in the Canyon Country Chamber of Commerce. The only opposition to this move came from Larry Wade, Chamber vice president and public relations director for the Newhall Land and Farming Company. Charles White, the chamber president, had been very supportive, and Dr. William Bonelli, a large landowner, said, "Big landowners have lots to fear from incorporation. They also have lots to gain. There is no doubt that we need incorporation here. We just simply don't have any control over our own destiny. But it's a tough problem to deal with. Possibly what you have to do is to convince the big landowners you will not be inimical to their interest before you draw the boundary lines."³

Judge Adrian Adams said that without farming company land included, particularly the shopping center on Lyons Avenue, a new city would miss a lot of revenue. William Kohlmeier, who ran the Back Woods Inn, a popular restaurant, raised the question of what the city would be named.

Peter Hill of the *Valley News* reported the next day that I had said, "nobody from Del Prado had any ax to grind." To me, this was quite true. I knew what I wanted: a city hall I could reach with a local call, to which I could drive in a few minutes and not have to pay a large parking fee, and local officials who understood our area and would listen to the local residents.

On March 27, Harry Bell and Larry Wade did not show up for the Joint Progress Committee meeting at Tips Sierra. Cityhood was not discussed. On April 6, *The Signal* reported that the Princess Park Homeowners Association had endorsed incorporation. With no progress reported from the chambers of commerce, Del Prado called a meeting of homeowner associations, in spite of the fact that many associations were not active on a regular basis. On May 12 it was reported that Chuck White announced that the Joint Progress Committee had referred the matter back to the Chamber with "a cryptic memo: 'Incorporate What?'"

White wrote quickly to Tom Davis that the Chamber would offer no influence or contacts until someone defined which part of the valley would be included in the proposed city. I was disappointed. I had thought they would exercise some leadership and their great knowledge of the community to select some boundaries.⁴

Del Prado hosted a meeting of homeowner associations late in April. Working without an agenda, I chaired what turned out to be a marathon meeting. Larry Wade of Newhall Land revealed, after much prodding from Tom Davis, that his company's concerns were about taxes and zoning. They had a good relationship with county planners and wanted to continue working with them to build the new town of Valencia. While our complaints about planning and zoning did not involve Newhall Land or Valencia, we knew we had a problem.

The homeowners meeting on May 14 drew about thirty people, many of whom had attended an earlier session in April, and acted on an agenda which had been discussed by the board of Del Prado.

Those present created the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia Federation of Homeowner Associations, formed a committee to write its “statement of purpose,” and then voted to start circulating petitions requesting that Los Angeles County create a new master plan for the valley. The associations included were Old Orchard, Pinetree, Princess Park Estates, Santa Clarita Park and Galaxy. Then they scheduled two informational meetings about the process of incorporation (with speakers already arranged by Tom Davis), and received a boundary proposal from me. The boundary proposal was modest, a few square miles to begin with, since it appeared the business community was too split to be of much help.

On May 16 Jon Newhall ran another editorial.

Until we [incorporate], we will continue to be treated like an unwanted step-child by our county leaders. They will continue to make decisions for us while locked within their luxurious quarters in the middle of congested Los Angeles.

Quite frankly, it is up to us to decide how we want our valley to grow, prosper and develop. We have the unique opportunity now to seize the control of our own destinies, if we honestly and sincerely choose to do something about it.

Let us not wait around and bicker about who should lead this great crusade to create our own city; and let us not sit on our hands for many more months or even years while disastrous planning and massive indifference turn this valley into a hodge-podge of slip-shod buildings and sliding roadways.

On May 21, 1969, Lee Arnold, the county-city coordinator in the county’s Chief Administrative Office, came to talk about the process of forming a city. Most encouraging was the word that he could do a preliminary study of an incorporation proposal if asked by Supervisor Warren Dorn. He made it clear that forming a city took at least two years, that we had to be able to tell LAFCO why we wanted to do it, and that we could be blocked by a petition of landowners owning a majority of the assessed valuation at any time.

The next Wednesday we met with a professional who had helped to incorporate cities. He made it obvious that it would take money and that we would have to raise it. We needed more information before we could raise money.

Jon Newhall continued to provide excellent cooperation. As managing editor of *The Signal*, working with his twin brother Tony, the publisher, he was the voice of the paper which had been purchased fairly recently by their parents, Scott and Ruth Newhall. While Scott was nominally the editor of the paper, he was also editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Scott was a board member of, and major stockholder in, The Newhall Land and Farming Company, a large corporation which controlled vast acreage in the valley, but was not inclined to be particularly concerned about the farming company’s point of view. On June 4, 1969, Jon published a map I had drawn of a proposed incorporation boundary that

included only about two square miles of the town of Newhall (which had been named for Scott's great-grandfather), west of the railroad tracks.

With the map appeared a questionnaire, and feedback came in the form of letters and phone calls. People were concerned about taxes, and the area of the proposed city being too small. I defended the original proposal as being one intended to provide a relatively high tax base with few flood control problems or streets, but it was obvious that more people wanted to be included. At the end of the first week of July we released a map including a small, developed portion of Valencia.

On June 12 the homeowners federation presented a petition asking for a master plan for Northern Los Angeles County to the Board of Supervisors. The petition was received warmly and was of tremendous strategic value in defeating a proposal by the Beverly Hills firm of Bollenbacher and Kelton to build high density residential on the balance of the old Del Prado area. At least B & K had been the first company to talk with me prior to going for a zoning change. As reported by Lionel Rolfe,

The company was ready to go. The planning commission had given its approval. The Del Prado protestors privately expected that what has happened in the past would happen again. They expected to be overruled by [a] high-powered and highly-polished development firm.

But a strange thing happened.

Dorn listened to Carl Boyer, a leader of the protestors who, by no small coincidence, is one of the mainstays of the incorporation move. The Supervisor suddenly stopped him.

Sounding like one of the early proponents of incorporation, Dorn issued a startling, impassioned, blast against – of all people – the developers.

He said they were in the process of ruining many of Valencia Valley's many fine hillsides.

Louis Kelton, who had been arguing the case for his development, was stunned. He tried to argue that his development was just fine. He even pointed out it was on flat land.

'Don't tell me,' Dorn snapped back. 'I know that area. My father and mother live there. I was born there. I've been out there a lot recently. Those people can't even flush their own toilets.'⁶

Warren Dorn had become, for the moment at least, our hero, and Louis Kelton came up with a low-density plan which provided condos across Avenida Dorena as well as single-family residential and some commercial, which we endorsed. At the same time the Planning Commission began to take notice of us ninety days after Jon Newhall had published his plea for a city. We pointed out that their maps showed no schools in locations where they had existed for years and that there were industrial uses and trailer parks in residential areas. Our growth in ten years from 14,987 to 57,084, by their own estimates, was startling, and required more attention.

Ken Gosting assumed the title of County Correspondent of our local paper. There were days that *The Signal* and the *Los Angeles Times* were the only newspapers, of more than seventy in the county, covering the meetings of the Board of Supervisors. Ken may have been the unnamed author of a piece in *The Signal* on July 14 which explained that the “master plan” for the North County (an area of about 2,500 square miles, or 60% of the total county territory) was created in 1960. Then the only subdivision in the valley was the Bonelli tract on San Francisquito Canyon Road, now Seco Canyon. The plan was thus “casual” in detail, so that when county officials talked about the master plan they were talking about something that “was virtually non-existent.”

The Federation of Homeowner Associations worked to solve problems as they happened, trying to help the county become more effective while attempting to form a city. This program earned kudos from Jon Newhall, who wrote on July 14, “This newspaper has found in the past that such groups usually are created as some sort of self-interest lobby-group whose sole purpose is to block something which merely a very small portion of the valley finds distasteful.”

We worked out of the public eye for about fourteen months. We opposed Anita Albrecq’s plans for 1,100 mobile homes (approved but never built) south of Newhall and heard Sea World’s plans for what later became Six Flags Magic Mountain, then a \$15,000,000 investment. All some of us could see were traffic problems, but I was personally more interested in jobs for our kids, including my own, who were five, four and two at the time. We worked through B & K proposals until they were approved. We submitted a map of a proposed city to the county in March 1970, and they began to research a factual report on incorporation.

Then in October of 1970, while I was in my third term as president of Del Prado, it was time to raise the issue of incorporation again. The publication of new tax rates was the impetus. Valencia had the highest rates in the county, and Newhall and Saugus were not far behind. Other problems cited included the distance from the county seat, toll calls to reach county government, the lack of local planning and zoning hearings, daytime meetings, poor rubbish collection, billboards and the high cost of special districts.

Apathy and the lack of leadership were major problems.

My tax bill had gone up about 15% in 1970 in spite of the assessment being the same. A major problem, however, was that property was not being reassessed regularly. Once I got my assessment reduced it stayed down for four more years. However, when property was reassessed the increases were huge because the market was going up steadily. I did not get bitten badly until 1977, when my tax bill went up from \$841.90 to \$1,359.91 in one year as a result of selling our condominium for \$49,500 and buying a single family house three blocks away, on the other side of Wiley Canyon School, for \$53,000. While Proposition 13 cut my tax bill to \$718.01 for 1978, by 2003 my home, worth then perhaps \$325,000, was assessed at \$85,067, and the tax was \$1262.11. I was afraid to move to another property; my newer neighbors were paying a lot more in taxes than I.

The big problem was that until 1976 the Board of Supervisors kept increasing the tax rates while assessments were climbing rapidly, with individual properties reassessed once every five years so that tax increases came as a great shock. They saw an opportunity to build county facilities rather than cutting taxes.

Instead of passing Proposition 13 we should have voted the supervisors out of office. However, ignorant and foul-mouthed Howard Jarvis provided leadership for Prop 13, and I provided no leadership for my point of view.

A table based on map book 2825, page 016, parcel 046 illustrates the problem with property taxes.

| Year | Assessed value | Exemptions | Total tax rate | Total tax bill |
|------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1968 | \$5960 | \$ 0 | 10.2124 | 606.70 |
| 1969 | 5960 | 0 | 11.7458 | 698.07 |
| 1970 | 5200 ⁷ | 750 ⁸ | 12.0067 | 543.39 |
| 1971 | 5200 | 750 | 13.7505 | 620.99 |
| 1972 | 5200 | 750 | 14.4224 | 650.28 |
| 1973 | 5200 | 750 | 14.8061 | 667.38 |
| 1974 | 5200 | 1750 | 15.2814 | 545.98 |
| 1975 | 7225 | 1750 | 15.4086 | 860.06 |
| 1976 | 7225 | 1750 | 15.0699 | 841.90 |

I knew no one whose income was increasing at the rate that taxes were. While the figures no doubt look small to the twenty-first-century reader, my bill went up more than 50% between 1974 and 1975.

On Oct. 28, 1970, we met in the Del Prado clubhouse to discuss the *Factual Report on the Newhall-Valencia Area* issued by the county on our mapped two and one-half square mile proposal with 2,670 dwelling units and a population of about 8,350. Larry Wade objected to the lack of an industrial tax base. However, this was not significant because no city property tax was proposed.

In the long run industry would annex into the city, the county special districts would be scrapped along with their taxes, and then a city tax might be instituted to make up for the loss of special district revenue. Then industry might provide some revenue.

Lee Arnold estimated the cost of law enforcement at \$460,086, street maintenance at \$39,100, street construction at \$458,800, and maintenance for Newhall Memorial Park and Old Orchard Park at \$55,973 and \$25,178 respectively. The assessed valuation was \$16,062,975. Revenues would include \$52,202 in state fuel taxes, \$40,337 from cigarette taxes, \$95,228 from motor vehicle license "in lieu" taxes, and sales taxes of \$205,442, as well as liquor license fees of \$4,428 and county gas tax cash aid to cities of \$11,884.

Additional revenues could include business license fees and franchise fees. Counties did not charge business license fees, so they would have represented another increase in the cost of government, but franchise fees were the normal charges on the utilities for their use of public property. The revenue would be transferred from the county to the city. However, we did not fully appreciate why the report was so vague.

At the meeting there were many questions about why the territory to be incorporated was so small, and in reporting the meeting *The Signal* story included an erroneous statement that an incorporation election had been held in Newhall seven years before. There never had been an election. Incorporation had been discussed in the 1920s, and had been the subject of a greater effort in the 1950s, when Newhall Land and Farming Company and Standard Oil had allegedly petitioned, as property owners, against a seven square mile proposal.

Due to the turnover of owners and staff, and the lack of a good newspaper morgue, or file of old clippings, much of the “history” related in the paper depended on the memory of some reporter’s contact. Without the backing of the Chamber of Commerce we lacked credibility. In December we solicited Saugus residents to join us, but general apathy reigned.

On January 8, 1971 opposition surfaced in the form of a letter to the editor by Marie McAfee of Saugus, who objected to our failure to talk about forming a charter city, another layer of taxes, a small police force, and the loss of the California Highway Patrol. To this list she added “the loss of most county services” while we would continue to pay the county general tax rate, rule by an outside “Dictatorial City Manager who appoints most of the city officials,” and the majority of cities having a city property tax. She also complained about the potential for gambling, and unqualified people proposing a city budget.

She added, “The misinformed and blind taxpayer, hog-tied by incorporation taxes, will have another layer of government and will have another finger in the till.”

Then she said, “We” are for preserving “our ‘Home-Rule’ City Charter,” a “low tax Base” to attract industry, increasing our Sheriff Department and expanding the Highway Patrol. In addition she wanted to maintain “our excellent County Services,” allow the county to supervise the orderly growth of the Newhall-Saugus area, “as it alone has the engineering ability, the equipment and the necessary finances.” She wanted to maintain police helicopter surveillance, keep government in check and hold down taxes, and zone for the benefit of the community. “We the undersigned will not be undersold on these screwball ideas of the so called intellectuals of Newhall-Saugus.

“Marie McAfee

“Saugus”

It really hurt that anyone could come up with a letter like this, but what really concerned me was how many others felt the same way. We were doing a terrible job of teaching government in the high schools, where teachers often never got to the local government chapters at the end of the book, and new committee members had to make a lot of effort to learn about city formation.

What were the facts, as we learned them slowly?

All new cities in California are required to organize as general law cities. After a short time they can, by vote of the people, adopt a charter. While a charter does allow city government to be tailored according to local needs, it is also subject to initiatives by special interests.

“Another layer of government” was an argument that struck a chord with many. It took a while for me to figure out how to answer that. Jerry Jones, Michael Carey and I eventually published a list of roughly thirty special districts in the Santa Clarita Valley and talked about how each of them was charged “undistributed overhead” by Los Angeles County. A city would be able to function very nicely on the amount of county overhead in addition to normal sources of revenue (spelled out in the Factual Report). In addition it could seek the grant monies for which the county applied so it could pay for such things as \$458,800 worth of street construction, which I was certain was no gift out of county funds.

When I studied the county’s publication, *Tax Rates by Code Areas*, it became obvious that urban areas all enjoyed lower taxes if they were in a city, for the cities did not have the multitude of special districts. In 1971 our tax rate for Road District No. 5 was 0.0687, for Soil Conservation was 0.0153, for flood control was 0.3626, and for sewer maintenance was 0.0574. In addition the rate for Sanitation District No. 32 was 0.7728, for Upper Santa Clara Water was 0.5800, for fire protection was 0.7499, for the county library was 0.2248, and for lighting was 0.1836. Some of the general law cities did have rates as high as 1.0000 in addition to a few of these rates, and some had no rates at all. The Los Angeles city rate was generally about 2.8500, including virtually all of these services. We were paying a tax rate of 3.0151 in my tax code area for municipal services over which we had no control.

Only much later, during my years on the city council, did I learn how the special districts really functioned.

McAfee objected to a small police force. That was what we had under county rule. Yes, the Highway Patrol did pull out upon incorporation in 1987, for they refused to submit a bid for patrolling the streets, but the Sheriff’s Department included manpower for traffic patrol when they submitted their estimates for the cost of contract law enforcement.

In 2001 there were a few people who accused our long time city manager, George Carvalho, of being dictatorial. He might have given Marie McAfee fits, but she was not around to find out. The voters elect the city council, and, under the general law form of city government, the city council elects the mayor to a one-year term unless the people vote to change that system. The city council hires the city attorney and the city manager, and the city manager hires the employees. In practice, whenever George Carvalho thought the council would like to make a choice of department heads he brought the decision to them. The department heads and their subordinates do the routine hiring.

When we incorporated in 1987 we lost no county services. We contracted with the county to provide all services. As we found ways to provide those same services more responsively, more efficiently and more cheaply, we discontinued county contracts. A general law contract city can provide its own services, contract with another city, contract with a county, or contract with private enterprise. No one system works best in every respect. By the same token, we

could eventually replace special district taxes with lower city property taxes, where that would increase efficiency and the total rate could be reduced. McAfee was correct in alleging that a majority of the council could allow card rooms or “casinos” to be established in the city. Some established cities had such facilities. However, the issue was never raised in the Santa Clarita Valley.

I felt unqualified to produce a city budget, and was working in that area simply to help determine whether we should be working on a city at all. I knew that LAFCO would not permit cityhood to go on the ballot if it would not work financially.

As for what McAfee favored, we had no “‘home rule’ city charter” to preserve. It never existed. The “low tax Base to attract industry” argument made no sense. If she meant a low tax rate, we had the exact opposite. We all wanted to increase public safety services. As for maintaining our excellent county services, it was the quality of county services during times of flooding which really upset the local people and led to Jon Newhall’s call for incorporation. Engineering services could be hired, from the county if necessary. The issue of helicopters was raised a number of times in various campaigns, but I could never figure out why. We always had them.

Keeping government in check under county government was a laugher in 1971. Los Angeles County was larger, from year to year, than forty-three states. It was ruled at the time by five white men, who were elected on average by probably not more than 500,000 voters. Later, women and minorities were elected to the Board of Supervisors, but they were never elected in an effort to unseat an incumbent supervisor. As far as holding down taxes was concerned, no literate and thinking person could agree with McAfee. Taxes kept going up; county officials kept pushing to build all the facilities they felt they needed, and the Board of Supervisors seldom said no.

On Jan. 11, 1971, Anthony Newhall ran an editorial saying that the community could not afford to fail to help us bring them city government. It seemed to fall on deaf ears. Yes, it was true that few had any idea why they paid \$35 a year in taxes to the Upper Santa Clara Valley Water Agency, or why each Valencia Hills family paid about \$106 for special district landscaping.

Newhall asked could the landscaping be done more cheaply? The problem was that the county yard was in Arcadia. If the maintenance crew found a broken sprinkler head in a median strip they would look for one on their truck. If it was not there they could not go to Newhall Hardware and buy one, they were required to drive to Arcadia to get one out of stock.

Tony Newhall also asked about school and water taxes, naming speculative projects. Yes, we had to pay to build schools, and our taxes were the highest because the state did not help. Later, the City of Santa Clarita had a policy of not approving development if the developers did not pay their own way for infrastructure, including schools. If the school districts refused to provide a letter of support the development was stalled. However, the developers went to the legislature in Sacramento and got the law changed so that developers only have to

pay a fee to cover partial costs of building schools. The city can no longer stall them the way they used to.

In many communities people have stopped approving bond issues and the public schools have gone to the dogs. Private schooling is very expensive for a generally inferior situation that looks good primarily because the private schools can eject problem children.

In mid-January Jerry Jones, Serge Podtetenieff and I went to talk with Newhall Land, meeting with corporate president Thomas L. Lowe and Larry Wade. Tom Lowe said that incorporation was premature, that we should await industrial growth and the building of a major shopping center, which he believed would be built about 1976, so we would have a larger tax base. He felt we should incorporate the valley at one time, to avoid fragmentation. This was a legitimate concern, for the population centers of Saugus and Canyon Country were separated from the Newhall-Valencia area by open land. It would make no sense to have separate cities in each area.

Then the real issues were spelled out. Newhall Land and the county worked well together in developing Valencia and bringing Magic Mountain and the California Institute of the Arts to the valley. The company did not want to risk its huge investment on the whim of unknown small-town councilmen. Newhall Land would be very willing to help with tax reduction efforts. As *The Signal* put it on Jan. 20, "The homeowners left the meeting with their visions of a city still a mirage on a distant horizon." In his editorial of that day Anthony Newhall predicted that the people would unite to incorporate on "the day that the City of Los Angeles oozes over the hill and tries to embrace us in its loathsome grasp. That day, Mr. Boyer, you will get help." I was quoted in *The Clarion*, a small weekly, as expressing the hope that the service clubs and chambers of commerce would come to the rescue. They did not.

On January 27, 1971, Anthony Newhall, or was it his father Scott, aptly called the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia-Canyon Country area "a hyphenated monstrosity." He said we were indifferent to an "unthinking U.S. census" combing the valley and counting about 19,000 people in Newhall, Valencia and "Rancho Santo Clarita (whatever that is)," while they dropped 40,000 more people into "some crack or other." He grouched about a "thoughtless Regional Planning Commission" which "happily endorsed" four more billboards.

And while we sit and wait for the fine things to come, the county tears at our vitals with taxes, at our landscape with billboards, at our education and structure with senseless developments.... [W]e can stop some of these things by acting like a community....

Above all, to be something real, and not a nameless bastard nonentity, we need a name on the map. Who is going to work warmly for Newhall-Valencia-Rancho Santo Clarita-Saugus-Castaic?

The same day Jackie Storinsky, the editor-publisher of *The Clarion*, agreed with the idea of a "buyers beware guide" to be issued to prospective buyers of real estate in the valley.

As it appeared we were not making much progress with incorporation, I put some of my energy into the problem of billboard blight. The problem with billboards was that they kept going up, but never came down.

It was time to participate in another Planning Commission hearing, and that resulted in a *Signal* editorial, “Either Planning or Chain Saws,”

Carl Boyer, who is a sort of one-man civic improvement committee (but more effective and practical than most committees) is again tilting the windmill known as the Regional Planning Commission.

Hardly windmills, except in the Quixotic sense – the Commission generates its own wind. And with it they manage to blow any efforts made by ordinary citizens to stay the ooze of ugliness.

Boyer has asked the Planning Commission not to approve a billboard proposed for the corner of Soledad Canyon and Camp Plenty Roads. His ground[s] are excellent: it will advertise, probably in the same garish psychedelic colors, the same subdivision that it noted on another side of the same corner [which]...intrudes wildly on the gaze of every passerby.

He has made a non-hysterical and sound proposal: Let the billboard people, if they demand their new and duplicating signs, take down two empty ones. There are plenty to remove.

We have heard the billboard men present their pleas to the Planning Commission. They are always very logical. They say that a nearby real estate development, or service station, or restaurant, must somehow indicate its location.

The zoning board, which makes the first move, listens sympathetically and grants the permit. They are heedless about ruining a lovely landscape; the content and color of the display does not matter; and who cares about that place out in the sticks, anyhow?

Then the billboard goes up. The advertiser advertises, some time later, the houses are sold or the business changes hands and the billboard is blanked. Does it come down? No.

There are at least nine vacant billboards along the stretch of San Fernando Road between Newhall and Soledad Canyon Road. They sit there; meanwhile the outdoor advertising companies have expanded their permits and seek more.

Mr. Boyer has made a reasonable and just suggestion; he is not blindly trying to cripple either the advertiser or the billboard company.

We have heard a lot, lately, in the form of correspondence telling us how the people of Canyon Country love the unspoiled beauty of the Old West. All the evidence that we can see indicates that the hard-riding cowboys of North Oaks, Four Oaks, and Blue Sky would sell Old Paint to the glue factory if they could make a buck at it.

If there ever was a good cause in Canyon Country, Boyer’s is it. Why doesn’t someone offer support?

Or maybe the solution is to tell the chainsaw operators, next time they start in on local oaks, to go after something more worthy of their attention.⁹

In mid-April of 1971 Tom Neuner made a motion at one of our Saturday morning breakfast meetings to hire a professional fundraiser, and to interview political consultants John M. Johnston of Long Beach, and George Voigt, who was well known among the contract city elected officials and managers. Tom Neuner was a somewhat bombastic Democratic Party activist who had an interesting way with words, referring, for example, to College of the Canyons, our local community college, as “College of the Crayons.” Johnnie Johnston had been out before, at the invitation of Tom Davis. I was not sure that he would go over well with the local people, and said to the paper, “The public relations men are likely to be cigar-chomping, diamond-studded, tough professional politicians, but it is becoming apparent that local people want action rather than talk.”¹⁰

Johnnie was not happy to read that. I pointed out that he did not fit the description of cigar-chomping. He talked about the utilities and the garbage companies being good sources of contributions, but it was obvious to me that we needed help looking for money as none of us seemed to have the stomach for political fundraising. George Voigt was a likeable person, but not a miracle worker who could make our members get out and beg for funds. The Executive Director of the California Contract Cities Association, he was always looking for more to do. There was a brief flurry of news coverage, and then it faded. We were making no progress.

Early in August George Voigt came out to Del Prado’s clubhouse and showed the film, “The Lakewood Story,” which illustrated how the citizens of Lakewood had incorporated their city as the first contract city in California in 1954. The idea was to end the work of the Incorporation Study Committee and form a Committee for Incorporation. Less than forty people showed up. We trusted too much to the power of newspaper coverage to get people out to do something for their community.

Chris and I went on a long family drive around the United States with our kids, leaving behind an itinerary with Ruth Newhall at *The Signal*. It was a wonderful trip, visiting parents in Littleton, Colorado and Middletown, Ohio, Chris’s aunts and cousins in the area of Troy, New York, and in Vermont, and my grandmother in Thornton, New Hampshire. We had impromptu French lessons for the children in Québec City, and visited more relatives and friends in the Philadelphia area, Washington, D.C., and South Carolina. We spent a day in New Orleans while our car was being repaired, made a very brief unplanned side-trip to Mexico when we found ourselves in the wrong lane of a highway in El Paso, and made it home in time for me to go back to teaching.

Along the way I received a telegram from Ruth Newhall, letting me know that Warren Dorn had appointed me to the North County Citizens Planning Council in the place of Charles Weeks, who had resigned. The council had been appointed, and allowed some staff help from the Planning Commission, after the

federal government had withheld \$100,000,000 intended to help build an airport in Palmdale. Washington wanted a better planning study.

In October we began to talk about a grass-roots fundraising drive. I was soon quoted as saying that we had thousands of dollars pledged. Years later it has to be said that this was probably based on hazy claims by several board members about their own success in raising money. I had gone around Del Prado and garnered about \$600 in pledges, but when I never saw any cash from other committee members I made no attempt to convert the pledges.¹¹

Meanwhile we thought we were making some progress with the Regional Planning Commission, which had at least promised to consolidate all Santa Clarita Valley cases into the third Tuesday of each month, but then decided that zone change cases and zone exceptions would be held on different days.

Early in November the county published a new *Factual Report on the Newhall-Valencia Area*. It was a mess, indicating that expenses for a city for the current fiscal year would be \$1,330,000, while income would be \$500,000. We soon found out that the Sheriff’s Department had submitted an estimate for the entire area covered by the Newhall Station (including Gorman many miles to the north), and other departments had responded incorrectly to a vague request for information. Road construction funds listed were for a bridge on Bouquet Canyon Road, far north of the planned city limits. We explained this as well as we could, but I felt the public would have difficulty believing that we could be trusted more than the county. At least we could savor a small victory on the billboard front as the Planning Commission ruled against two permit renewals.

Ray Cooper, our legislative chairman from Canyon Country, requested formation of a Citizen Advisory Council, and was quoted at some length in *The Signal*.

The fact that the government center is 35 miles away, with terrific telephone toll charges and no transportation has discouraged and impeded the public in their needs.

Many times county employees are rude and contemptuous to callers. I have observed that the only time our organizations are listened to is, when they storm commission or supervisorial meetings, petitions are presented and a show of force is made in the hope that this veiled form of threat will shake the politicians into a fair hearing of grievances.

Now I ask you, what kind of democratic government is this?¹²

We also began the battle against a proposed “new city” called Granada. Hard working Dick Haak, with whom I alternated the presidency of the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia Federation of Homeowner Associations until it died for lack of interest, and Ray Cooper placed a half-page ad against Granada in *The Signal*. They had gained endorsements and petition signatures for our position on the project, which we felt was not the proposed “new town” its proponents claimed it to be, but simply a cover for a massive mobile home park at Bouquet Canyon and Vasquez Canyon Roads. On this issue we had the support of the Newhall-Saugus-Valencia Chamber of Commerce and the high school district, as well as

the Sand Canyon Homeowners Association, the Placerita Canyon Property Owners Association, the Sierra Club, and the Saugus Elementary School District.

Granada had sneaked through the Planning Commission while we had been fighting local battles on two fronts, there being a hearing before the Board of Supervisors the same day. In the ad we listed some of our grievances, including the county's plan to make privately owned Placerita Canyon Road into a county master plan highway, after chopping down all the oaks along the road. Our valley's protest, led in large measure by Dorothy Riley, was a funeral march by hundreds down the narrow winding road and hanging Supervisor Dorn from a massive oak tree in effigy. We also listed the IT Corporation's plan for a trash dump in Sand Canyon, problems in developing Pinetree which had been resolved only by state intervention, and the need for Sierra Hills to take legal action against Occidental Petroleum as examples of our education in how developers worked.

In one respect the system seemed to be working better. Maps of parcels proposed for zone changes were included with notices of public hearings. The Planning Commission was holding informational meetings in our valley, addressed by planning staff and developers, so that we could have our questions answered before going to hearings in Los Angeles. Alfred Paonessa, the chairman of the commission, was responding favorably to requests to get issues discussed in the informational meetings, and the commission was making an effort to consolidate Santa Clarita Valley cases into one hearing each month.

However, a *Signal* editorial was right. "But still needed is a requirement that developers submit a plan, if there is one, at the time of a zone change request so that homeowners in the affected area need not in panic start making fruitless phone calls, taking up their time and that of the planning commission staff, who may know little more than homeowners. There is no need for mystery and guessing games."¹³

Our weekend protest against Granada had many of our 125 supporters arriving on horseback or carrying symbolic fishing poles. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had closed the floodgates upstream early the week before so the creek was fairly dry. We claimed a conspiracy between Los Angeles and Occidental Petroleum. *The Signal* editorial, "A Great Deal to Protest," said that "it is a long, long way to Civic Center on a weekday morning. And even when neighbors do appear and protest, their voices do not often have the authority to overcome the clang of developers' dollars in campaign chests.

Right now, this community, in the eyes of the distant Planning Commission, is a bunch of soreheads. They are protesting everything.

The soreheads, however, are right....

Up with soreheads!¹⁴

On Dec. 8, 1971, with the Granada appeal before the Board of Supervisors coming up the next day, Ruth Newhall's editorial appeared in *The Signal*, "In Granada, Money Matters."

Granada, which means pomegranate in Spanish, has become a question as seedy as its namesake.

Tomorrow, at the Supervisors’ hearing, all the well-practiced arguments will doubtless be reviewed again: the environmental, ecological, life-quality, and other persuasive factors will be outlined.

When it comes right down to it, the major proponents and opponents are arguing about the same thing: money. Granada is a shot at a federal bundle for the landowners; a big order for a mobile-home company; a source of developers’ contributions for Supervisors in an election year.

On the other side is a hard-pressed community, whose taxes are staggering. To them Granada can only mean one more burden to carry. Caught in the middle, and suffering, moneywise, no matter which way the decision goes, are the owners of neighboring acres of desert and canyon rangeland. In today’s Letters Column Mr. Robert Lombardi speaks eloquently for them.

Mr. Lombardi and many other longtime landowners in the valley have been caught in a vicious vise. Their land has been taxed, not on its use as rangeland, but on its potential conversion to homesites.

This policy is what caused overbuilding in the San Fernando Valley – the rise of cluster housing and cheap apartments that are now distressed by vacancies. They were built because the county decreed that the land was suitable for building. The owners had to build or see their property confiscated by taxes.

About five years ago the voters of the State offered relief for this situation by passing the Williamson Act. The act provided that owners of ten acres or more could pledge their land to remain ‘open space’ for a minimum period of ten years, and that if they did so their land would be taxed as agricultural, not residential. The act also provided that if any property owner changed his mind and built on this open land, he would be liable for back taxes.

This was a reasonable approach. There was only one basic condition: Each county had to agree in advance to allow such applications, or the act would not apply. Many counties have done so.

But Los Angeles County, after announcing that it would accept applications from landowners in this county, suddenly changed its mind. What happened was that a rash of such applications was received (some 80, we understand) in the first two weeks. This was natural in a vast county with great amounts of open space. It was particularly natural because among the landholders were many who had spent generations on their lands, and had by no means bought them as speculative investments.

The county saw substantial (though often unfair) tax revenues going down the drain. So men like Mr. Lombardi see themselves paying taxes that are unrealistic, and hope that maybe quick development will save them.

We think it is the county's duty to save such situations by falling in line with State policy, and not by forcing development where it should not exist.

Tomorrow the spokesmen for taxpayers, for school districts, for ranchers, for developers, for all manner of people who have something to lose or something to gain will have words on Granada.

The Supervisors will make the decision. Maybe the key question is: How much is Granada worth, in an election year, to our supervisor?¹⁵

The question was apt. It was the practice of the "five little kings" of Los Angeles County to run their own fiefdoms. We knew that Warren Dorn would make a recommendation that would then be approved by the entire Board.

Fourteen speakers from our valley sat in the front row of the hall the next morning, supported by about a dozen more residents. Supervisor Ernest Debs disqualified himself as an owner of stock in Occidental Petroleum, the developer of the proposed new city. Richard Haak led off, speaking for the Federation, followed by Hart District Superintendent Dave Baker, who had protested a proposal for Happy Valley in Newhall only two days before. Haak used the county's own publications to show that the proposed "new city" of Granada would be a danger to all, primarily because of traffic access problems, while Baker said the schools could not handle the growth involved. Winston Watkins of the American Beauty Homeowners Association submitted a thousand more petition signatures, and asked the Supervisors to judge the case "on the merits – and since it has no merit we suggest it be denied."¹⁶

We did not hear Supervisor Kenneth Hahn say, "I liked that one," to the reporters behind him. When we were accused of racial prejudice, Ray Cooper of Sierra Hills pointed that one of the listed speakers, Louis Brathwaite of Monteverde's homeowners, was black. Sonja Remmen, president of CURE (Citizens United for a Respectable Environment) presented the environmental argument, and Michael Carr, an actor, represented some of the local landowners. Arba Bly, a member of the Palmdale city council, protested, and Barbara Carrozo was the final speaker allowed to present all of her argument. Supervisor Warren Dorn, then Chairman of the Board, made the plea that the hearing had gone on for forty-five minutes, which was a record for such things, and that we had to close. I was given time to point to the map on the wall, and ask the question, "Does it even look like a city?"

Don Mallas, the representative of Occidental Petroleum, became the butt of a pun by Dorn, "With malice towards none." Dorn moved denial and was joined by Kenneth Hahn and Frank Bonelli.

Burton Chace abstained.

The next day *The Signal* led with the above the masthead headline: "Supervisors Reject 'Granada.'"

"'Granada,' like the mythical city of Atlantis, sank into oblivion yesterday. "It was torpedoed by the County Board of Supervisors, ending a six-month siege against the 'city.'"

Our valley, standing united, had won. As Ruth Newhall put it in her editorial, “Democracy works for citizens if citizens work for democracy.”

Within days the members of the North Los Angeles County Citizens Planning Council were back at work in Lancaster. I was not enjoying my participation. We had been presented with five volumes of materials by consultants Quinton-Budlong. I read every word, but had felt the language of the presentation was intended put the Council members to sleep. I had been blunt, “It’s like reading the telephone book. The problem is going to be finding a shredder big enough to handle this copy.”

The staff rebuttal was recorded by Ruth Newhall, who attended the Council meetings, “You may not like to read that stuff. How’d you like to *write* it?”¹⁷

When the consultants said that finishing the process of a plan for the North County would cost more than the planned one million dollars, that the total tab would be more like \$1,600,000, the planning staff said they did not think the county could afford it.

At that my blood pressure rose. “Perhaps if Los Angeles County can’t do it, we should form our own county!” There was dead silence. I looked around. Council members were grinning, and the staff members had turned a ghostly shade of white.

¹*The Signal*, April 26, 1968.

²*The Signal*, March 7, 1969.

³*The Signal*, March 14, 1969.

⁴*The Valley News*, March 14, 1969.

⁵*The Signal*, May 14, 1969.

⁶*The Signal*, June 18, 1969.

⁷The reduction resulted from appealing the original assessed value.

⁸This was the result of an amendment to the state constitution.

⁹*The Signal*, April 14, 1971.

¹⁰*The Signal*, April 19, 1971.

¹¹*The Signal*, Oct. 25, 1971.

¹²*The Signal*, Nov. 3, 1971.

¹³*The Signal*, Dec. 1, 1971.

¹⁴*The Signal*, Dec. 6, 1971.

¹⁵*The Signal*, Dec. 8, 1971.

¹⁶*The Signal*, Dec. 10, 1971.

¹⁷*The Signal*, Dec. 13, 1971.