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Talk of Modesto annexing its neighbor to the north is getting more serious.

City and Stanislaus **County** leaders are considering whether to split the cost of a study that would weigh the fiscal ramifications of annexing **Salida** to Modesto.

If the **City** Council gives the OK on Wednesday, staff would negotiate an agreement with the **county** for hiring Goodwin Consulting Group of Sacramento to perform the \$60,000 study. **County** supervisors will decide whether to authorize the study Tuesday.

"**County** and **city** staff have discussed the possibility of jointly funding an independent analysis that would look at all aspects of annexing **Salida**, and the fiscal impacts to both the **county** and the **city**," says a staff report attached to the **City** Council agenda.

Tuesday's National Night Out activities prompted Modesto to move its council meeting to Wednesday.

The consultant would examine the costs of providing public services to **Salida**, an unincorporated town of 13,722 residents. They also would develop all-important tax-sharing scenarios for Modesto and the **county**. The **city** and **county** each could spend an additional \$3,000, depending on the scope of the study.

Modesto Mayor Garrad Marsh and **county** Supervisor Terry Withrow have held recent discussions about **Salida**. There has been talk for years of **Salida** incorporating as its own **city**, but doing so is not considered viable in the current economy.

BUSINESS PARKS?

Marsh announced a desire to start exploring the annexation during his State of the **City** address in March. He said land approved for business parks in the **Salida** community plan could bring needed jobs to the area and generate taxes to pay for services.

The Goodwin study would determine whether Modesto and the **county** could come to agreement over sharing tax revenue.

Withrow, whose district includes **Salida**, said the agencies would expect to see the study completed in 60 days. If the consultants conclude an annexation is feasible, he said, the next step is holding town hall meetings to share the information with the public. Annexation votes could be held in 2013.

"If we can come to agreement on tax sharing, we can take it to the people and see what they say. The people of **Salida** and people of Modesto are going to decide this," Withrow stressed.

The supervisor said he wants to explore annexation as a way to provide better law enforcement and other services to **Salida**. He said he's concerned **Salida** could become an underserved **county** pocket as Modesto claims more territory north of its current boundaries.

"With the **county's** budget issues, the services provided to **Salida** are not good," Withrow said. "I represent **Salida**, so I need to go with what the people of **Salida** want. If the people don't want to do this, then I won't push for it."

Officials want an independent firm to do the financial analysis to ensure it's objective and impartial. Goodwin Consulting is in line for the contract because of the previous work it has done for Modesto and the **county**.

Marsh has expressed concern that the **county** runs \$3 million to \$4 million in the red every year providing services to **Salida** and he doesn't see the **city** taking on the cost, unless revenues are identified to cover the expense.

The **county** Board of Supervisors meets at 9 a.m. Tuesday in the basement chamber of Tenth Street Place, 1010 10th St. The **City** Council meets at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the same location.

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