

Residents to decide if 2 areas will join the city

By Josh Baugh
STAFF WRITER

For thousands of people living in Bexar County near Camp Bullis and Lackland AFB, the outcome of propositions on Tuesday's ballot will determine whether they'll become San Antonians or stay county residents.

The ballot measures ask voters to decide whether the city should be allowed to annex areas within 5 miles of Lackland, with power to collect "fines, fees and other charges" and, eventually, provide services and assess taxes.

Even if voters reject the city's annexation plan, San Antonio still will have the authority to enforce certain land-use regulations on new development surrounding the military facilities.

"We view all of this as a win-win scenario because the existing residents in those areas get a choice," said Jeff Coyle, director of government and public affairs for the city. "Either option they choose, the city will still have the ability to regulate future development there."

Not everyone agrees it's win-win.

The Homeowners Against Annexation is fighting the propositions, citing concerns the city could start imposing fines for myriad reasons. And state Sen. Donna Campbell, R-New Braunfels, who wrote the legislation that allows for the annexation vote, challenged San Antonio's ballot language — unsuccessfully.

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Voters near 2 bases will decide if those areas will join the city

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Before last year's legislative session, it was much easier for big cities to annex bordering areas. They faced certain limitations and regulations, but ultimately could add territory without the consent of the people who lived there.

That changed in 2017, when the Legislature adopted Campbell's Senate Bill 6, which requires cities in counties with more than 500,000 residents to secure voter approval of proposed annexations.

The bill included a provision that allows cities to extend their land-use ordinances to areas within 5 miles of military bases, even if voters there reject annexation.

Tuesday's election affects 18,780 residents, including 15,039 registered voters, in an area along Interstate 10 near Camp Bullis, and 40,205 residents, including 25,932 registered voters, in an area west of Lackland AFB.

Coyle said Tuesday's election will be a win for San Antonio, because even if votes reject annexation, the city will be able to protect the military bases from encroachment by residential and commercial development.

If unchecked, such encroachment could hamper the bases' ability to operate.

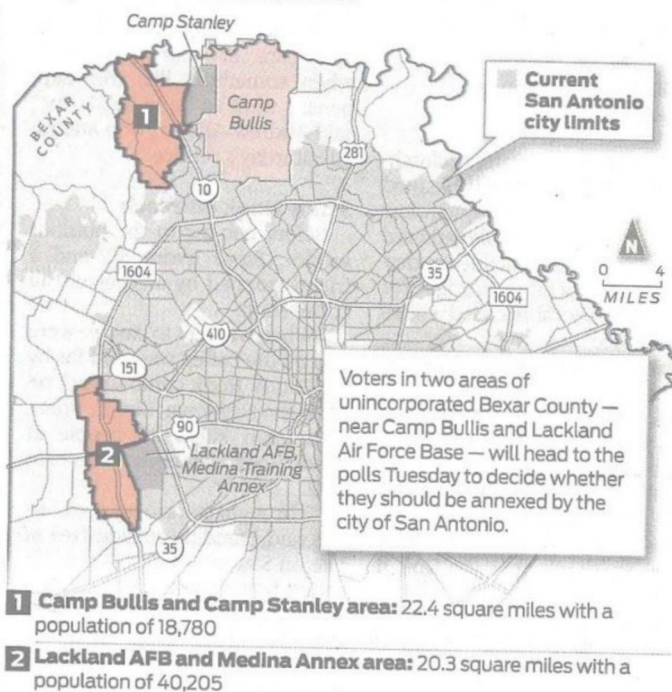
Coyle acknowledged that San Antonio officials had wanted to annex these areas for other reasons before the Legislature made holding an election a requirement.

"Military protection was one of the reasons for the previous annexation plans," he said. "There were others, such as the ability to plan the future growth."

If voters approve annexation, it could take up to three years before they begin paying property taxes and receiving city services, but the city would immediately have authority to impose fines and fees, according to the ballot language.

If voters reject annexation, the

Proposed annexations



Source: City of San Antonio

Staff graphic

city would have authority to assess fines and enact land-use ordinances recommended under a "Joint Land Use Study" conducted by the city and the military.

Campbell objected to the city's ballot language in an August letter to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, asking his office to issue an opinion on the legality of the language.

Dismissing her concerns, Paxton responded that courts would "likely conclude" that San Antonio's ballot language was "sufficient."

Mike Stewart, president of the Homeowners Against Annexation, has filed a lawsuit challenging the city's annexation plans and contending the ballot language is vague and confusing. Courts have not acted on the matter.

Stewart, who lives in the I-10 corridor northwest of San Antonio, said he and his neighbors have many of the same goals as

the city: limiting intrusive light, noise and density. But they don't want to pay city property taxes or accept city services.

Stewart said San Antonio officials have offered assurances that the city's land-use ordinances and codes wouldn't apply to existing developments. But Coyle said that if property owners want to renovate in the future, they would be required to comply with the requirements.

Stewart expressed concern that the city would immediately begin fining residents for violations.

Stewart said he believes that ultimately, the city's attempt to annex will be shot down.

"I think there will be seven people who vote for" annexation, he said. "And those are the seven people who don't want fireworks shot off in their neighborhood anymore."

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