

The Pro and Con Arguments

(From: The Annexation Handbook Chapter 1, Part 3)

Copyright © 2008 by the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington.

There are certain basic arguments, pro and con, that invariably surface during the course of an annexation attempt. Some of these may be based on fact, such as, “the annexing city, by extending its services to the new area, can avoid duplication of facilities.” Some concerns may be more difficult to demonstrate, such as, “urban areas must develop as a unit because their social and economic parts are interrelated.” Others may be related to partisan interests, such as, “special districts and their attendant influence must be retained.” Still other arguments may reflect fear of change: “the community to be annexed may lose its individuality and identity.” As noted above, however, many of these arguments will no longer be applicable in GMA counties after the establishment of urban growth areas.

The following list of arguments should assist in anticipating issues that may arise during annexation proceedings. City officials may want to carefully consider what facts exist to prove or disprove each argument, what special interests underlie some arguments, and what misconceptions may require correction.

A. Arguments Favoring Annexation

1. After annexation, the new territory will obtain its necessary services from city departments that are professionally staffed and experienced. Duplication of services can be avoided. Considerable economies can result from the coordination of services over a larger area.
2. When the interrelationship between the city and the fringe area is close, there is need for unified planning and zoning. By means of annexation, a city's zoning ordinances can be extended to adjacent areas in a logical manner, thus helping to assure orderly growth. Coordinated action is much easier to achieve if the fringe community becomes part of the city.
3. Annexation gives suburban residents a voice in the government of the larger community in which they live. County dwellers can be substantially affected by actions of the central city, but they have no participation in its affairs.
4. Business, professional, and community leaders who live in the fringe area can have a more direct role in community affairs by being elected or appointed to public office in the city.
5. Annexation eliminates the need to form a new city government with its attendant “start-up costs,” or to continue reliance on costly special districts.
6. Annexation leads to a unified community and can prevent the fragmentation of local governmental authority among a large number of special districts.

Fragmentation may cause “conflicts of authority and the absence of cooperation, political irresponsibility, a long ballot, duplication of services, inadequate service levels, lack of effective area-wide planning and programming, financial inequities and other problems.”⁶

7. Political boundaries will, after annexation, more nearly reflect the true and existing sociological, economic, cultural, and physical boundaries of the city. The fringe and the city are inextricably bound together.
8. Annexation increases a city's size and population, and in some instances raises its level of political influence, its prestige, and its ability to attract desirable commercial development. It may also increase its ability to attract grant assistance.
9. Annexation can protect, or enhance, a city's tax base. The increased valuation of the city will result in a greater bonding capacity.
10. Annexation may force new industry to develop in the city, and thus create additional jobs, revenues, and commercial opportunities.
11. Unified political representation, sound economic development, enhancement of property values, and high service levels at minimum costs can best come from total comprehensive planning that avoids duplication and conflict of authority.
12. City and county boundaries can be squared off and made orderly and logical, eliminating a hodgepodge and resulting confusion as to whether a particular parcel should look to a city or to the county to obtain services. Fire and police departments, in particular, can determine whether calls are within their respective jurisdictions.
13. Annexation may bring about lower utility rates, since city utility surcharges to unincorporated territory would be lifted. Annexation also often results in lower fire insurance premiums. As more improvements and urban utilities are made available, real estate values and marketability may improve.
14. Additional services may become available, such as sewer, water, ambulance, transit, and drainage control.

B. Arguments Opposing Annexation

1. Annexation may be considered unnecessary if the community's needs, or resources, are limited. It may be unwise if the community is not physically, economically, or socially related to the annexing city.
2. Residents outside the city may argue that they chose to build and live there in order to avoid taxes for services they do not want. Industry and commercial businesses may state that they located outside the city to avoid certain business and property taxes.

3. Residents may wish to retain the community's "rural" character and, for this reason, may oppose annexation as a step toward greater urbanization. There may, for example, be a strong opposition to municipal animal controls—both leash laws and restrictions on large animals.
4. The city's ordinances, regulations, and license requirements may not be appropriate for a particular fringe community.
5. Residents may desire a higher degree of community identity than they believe they will enjoy as part of a large city. They may want to retain special districts and their attendant influence. A larger municipal government may be less accessible to the people.
6. There may be distrust of the government and politics of the city to which annexation is proposed.
7. The city may not be able to finance the additional services expected by residents of the area proposed for annexation, and territory that is annexed to a city may be a financial drain upon it for many years. Services may not be available for extension without adversely affecting in-city service levels or without utility rate increases. Existing police or fire forces may be overextended, reducing the level of protection to the entire community.
8. There may be fear that annexation may lead to a geometric progression of municipal problems. It cannot be presumed that it will be more economical for a city to provide services to a larger area. Extending the service area may cost much more for each unit than the existing per unit cost.
9. Since most annexations are very small, annexation does not satisfactorily address community and regional concerns.
10. Interest in annexation may be limited to a select group of citizens and not shared at the grass roots level.