

April 4, 2007

Good Morning, Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Sally Ann Martinez; I am a resident of Von Ormy, Texas and I am here to read an official statement by the Committee to Incorporate Von Ormy, which is a grass-roots organization formed by Von Ormians to represent us in our efforts to become a municipality.

To the Chair and Members of the Land and Resource Management Committee of the Texas House of Representatives:

I speak before you in support of House Bill 3591, a bill that would allow the community of Von Ormy, which is located in Southwest Bexar County, to Incorporate into a municipality. I speak as the official representative of the Committee to Incorporate Von Ormy, whose membership includes over 75% of the residents of Von Ormy.

The basic issue involved is whether San Antonio may use its extra-territorial jurisdiction powers to deny our community basic services, a political voice and its constitutional right to local self-government.

In the summer of 2006 we petitioned the City of San Antonio to allow an election on the question of whether Von Ormy may incorporate into a municipality within the Extra-territorial jurisdiction of the City of San Antonio. In the subsequent meetings we have had with the City of San Antonio, San Antonio Water Systems (which is owned by the City of San Antonio, and the City of San Antonio Planning Department we have been expressly told that San Antonio has no current plans to bring municipal services to Von Ormy, including in their 20 year annexation plan. In fact, San Antonio's recent Southside initiative annexation excluded Von Ormy.

What we, the citizens of Von Ormy desire is our own municipal government so that we may bring desperately needed services to our community, services that the City of San Antonio and Bexar County are unable and/or unwilling to provide. Von Ormy is a short 20 minute drive from the Bexar County Courthouse, yet we lack sewage services, consistent trash pickup, municipal fire or police service. We have no public library, public transportation, parks or street lights. And many of the streets in our community remain unpaved. All we desire is the ability to provide a better standard of living for ourselves and our children. What is frustrating is San Antonio's disregard for our standard of living and their immoral position that they will use their Extra-territorial jurisdiction powers to deny us the political means to improve our community ourselves.

An equal concern is our desire to preserve the unique historical and social culture of Von Ormy. Something which would be destroyed is we were ever annexed by the City of San Antonio.

Von Ormy is a natural crossing point along the Medina River. Ancient Native American trails, the Spanish Camino Real, and the present IH-35 all chose Von Ormy as their crossing point. It was known in colonial times as Paso de las Garzas, during the Republic and early Statehood Era as Mann's Crossing and Medina Crossing and since 1886 Von Ormy. By the

dawn of the War for Texas Independence, many Tejano families engaged in cattle ranching along the banks of the Medina, including the notable Blas Herrera. In March of 1836, General Santa Ana and the Mexican Army reached the banks of the Medina at Von Ormy, and camped along the south side of the river. To this day you can visit the "Santa Ana Oaks" under which Santa Ana rested before his march to the Alamo. However, Von Ormy and Tejano Patriot Blas Herrera did not rest; he raced his horse to San Antonio to warn of Santa Ana's approach, not knowing he was also racing into Texas legend as the "Paul Revere of the Texas Revolution."

During the Republic, Von Ormy was home to many Tejano participants in the Revolution because many loyal Tejanos fearing the harassment and unlawful conduct of many of the newly arrived Anglo-Texans fled San Antonio to its outlying communities, including Von Ormy. Along with the Herrera's, Francisco Antonio Ruiz, the last Alcalde or mayor of San Antonio, who was ordered by Santa Ana to identify and bury the dead after the fall of the Alamo, moved to and is buried in Von Ormy. Juan Martinez, veteran of the Battle of Concepcion and Siege of Bexar also settled along the Medina in present Von Ormy. Texian spy "Deaf" Smith and his wife Guadalupe Ruiz Durán settled in Von Ormy before the Revolution as do their descendants today. Impresario Enoch Jones built a large mansion in Von Ormy in 1845, which was later purchased by the Prussian Count Norbert Von Ormy in 1885. The Count, along with his Countess and some 20 uniformed servants, planned to establish a European-style court at the mansion. However, the Countess returned to Europe after only a year's residence because she could not withstand the hay-fever season of South Texas, and the Count mysteriously disappeared a year after that. Our post office was renamed "Von Ormy" in 1886 in honor of the royal couple's short stay in our community.

The historic Von Ormy Catholic Parish, Santisima Trinidad, founded sometime in late 1836, burned to the ground in 1895 and for nearly three decades religious services were held under the canopy of trees along the banks of the Medina. These decades of struggle are still common memory in the parish and created some of the long standing bonds between families that exist to this day.

During the 1930's, highway 81 was built literally right through the main street of town. It took with it our historic town center and once again the Catholic Church. A divergence in the road of ½ a mile in either direction would have preserved the city center and Church. Once again the community unified and spent another 20 years raising money to build another Church, the present day Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church.

During the late 1970's the City of San Antonio planned a waste processing plant along the Medina in Von Ormy to process its north side sewage. The City did not even have the decency of allowing Von Ormians to use the plant; so we organized against this misuse of municipal power and won.

In fact, the City of San Antonio has traditionally neglected its West and South sides. For most of its existence San Antonio used ordinances and deed restrictions to limit its Hispanic residents to these areas. It then neglected the infrastructure of these areas to the point that today, thirty plus years after the end of official segregation, the South and West side of San Antonio suffers a notable lack of development, jobs, infrastructure, and attention of the City. If the City

if San Antonio ever annexes Von Ormy, we will be only a small community of 500 voters on the Southwest side of town, out of 1.1 million. How do you think they will respond to our needs? Do you think they will invest in our community? Do you think they will listen to us or respond to us any differently than the much larger and more established community groups on the West and South sides of San Antonio? We don't.

A City of Von Ormy, can potentially provide all kinds of city services: sewage service, trash pickup, public parks, local police, municipal fire department, libraries, a community center, assistance to the elderly or sick and many more. As our own municipality, we qualify for many more federal and state grants than we do as an unincorporated area or as a part of San Antonio.

To conclude, I will read you the preamble to our petition to incorporate:

Whereas, all political power is inherent in the PEOPLE, and all free governments are founded on THEIR authority, and instituted for THEIR benefit, and;

Whereas, the people of Texas have enshrined in their Constitution the inalienable right to alter, reform or abolish their government in such manner as they may think expedient, and;

Whereas, the community of Von Ormy has maintained a distinct historic and social identity since the War for Texas Independence, and;

Whereas, we, the undersigned, are citizens of Texas, a free and independent State, subject only to the Constitution of the United States, wish to exercise our God given and constitutionally enshrined right to local self-government, by incorporating our community into a municipality according to our right reserved in Article 11 of the Texas Constitution.

Therefore, we ask this honorable committee to stand behind us and all Texans who seek to exercise their political voice by passing this bill out of committee.

If there is only one thing you remember about this bill when you vote, let it be this. All we seek is the right to vote and determine our own political destiny.

May God Bless Texas and May God Bless Von Ormy.

Sincerely,

The Committee to Incorporate Von Ormy
Von Ormy, Bexar County, Texas