

Anti-annexation group rallies for fight

By Michael Stone

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Monday's meeting by the Hamilton County Residents Against Annexation wasn't a desperate cry for money, but board members said donations definitely wouldn't hurt.

"Are we broke? No. We have money in the bank to cover this first round in the courts," Bill Reesor, the group's spokesman, told a gathering of about 150 at Westview Elementary. "But let me tell you: It's more than just that."

The group's board said it has spent \$81,400 -- mostly on court costs and attorney fees -- with \$85,000 left to spend.

HOW THE GROUP SPENDS ITS MONEY

Open records requests: \$11,000

14 lawsuits filed: \$16,800

Interrogatories: \$7,000

Depositions: \$7,600

Attorney fees: \$34,400

Court motions/miscellaneous: \$4,600

Total spent: \$81,400

Reserves: \$85,000

Source: Hamilton County Residents
Against Annexation

"If we do not prepare ourselves for the upcoming litigation that is facing us, you will be annexed by default," Reesor said. "Attorneys don't work for nothing, and the minute the money runs out, the attorney doesn't show up in court and you're annexed by default."

HCRAA formed after 2009's effort by Chattanooga to bring areas in Hixson, Ooltewah, Lookout Valley and Apison into the city. With 14 lawsuits against the annexation and more expected to come, annexation has been postponed until the outcome of the cases.

The group has used the postponement as a rallying cry, noting that because the first court ruling is not expected until at least 2011, that's time residents in the annexed areas haven't had to pay city taxes.

"You didn't vote for the people in the City Council. You didn't vote for the mayor," Treasurer Ken Carey told the crowd. "But they are able to levy taxes on you."

But the city says its within its rights to annex these areas because they are in its urban growth boundary, formed in 2001.

City spokesman Richard Beeland called HCRAA's fight a "natural part of annexation."

"There are going to be people who are against it, and we understand that and respect that and respect the dialogue that we get with everyone," he said in a phone interview. "But we

are planning to proceed with everything that we have planned in the past."

Hamilton County Commissioner Larry Henry came to Monday's gathering to show his support of HCRAA. He, like other members who spoke, said that annexation is not about providing services to those annexed, but about bringing money into Chattanooga.

HCRAA President Kyle Holden said his group is taking its case to the Tennessee Legislature for possible changes in annexation laws.

"Right now, the cards are in the favor of the municipalities, and we're trying to get that changed," he said.

Morris Hill Road resident Roger Damron, 67, said he was fine with the services provided by Hamilton County.

"[My wife and I] are concerned about the tax increase," he said. "You don't really get any services for what you're paying."