

CITY FIXES TOWNS' PRICE

Los Angeles Offers \$5,421,521 to Owens Valley;
People There Say They Want More

By Chester G. Hanson
Los Angeles Times Correspondent
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INDEPENDENCE, June 29. – The price the city of Los Angeles is willing to pay for peace in the Owens Valley was fixed here today at \$5,421,521. The people of the valley say this is not enough.

The offer the city made to the people of the valley is for their five leading towns, including Laws, Lone Pine, Independence, Big Pine and Bishop.

The figure was revealed at a conference held at the city's general offices here this morning between the committee representing the city and one representing the towns.

The meeting was to have been held here last night but was postponed when H. A. Van Norman, general manager of the city's department of water and power, and chairman of the city's committee, was unable to get here.

SOLEMN MEETING

It was a solemn group of men and one woman who filed into the general offices and gathered around the long table to hear the long-awaited-for figure which the city is willing to pay for the towns and thus make a general clean-up of the problem of acquiring all the water rights in the valley.

Van Norman made only a few introductory remarks before presenting the report. He pointed out to the townspeople that the bond issue, part of which had been counted upon to finance the purchase of the towns, had failed of passage at the recent election at Los Angeles and that at present, therefore, there is no money available with which to buy the towns as planned. Until then, unless some new method of financing can be thought out, the purchase of the towns will have to wait.

The offer of nearly \$5,500,000 came as a distinct disappointment to the townspeople and although they withheld comment at first, their reaction was very obvious.

The general talk around the valley had been that somewhere around \$8,000,000 would be a fair price for the city to pay for the towns.

One man remarked that the city had indicated it would pay prices comparable to the prices it has been paying in the purchase of ranch lands and some town lots in the past.

The valley people say that in the majority of cases this has been about four times the equalized assessed valuation.

In some quarters the feeling has been that the city should pay about five times the assessed valuation. The city's figures are the result of an exhaustive and intensive survey made by experts brought up here, with the full co-operation of the townspeople.

The figure represents what in the opinion of the assessors is the present-day value of the towns.

BASIS OF CONTEST

One of the committeemen asked if no allowance had been made for the probable growth of the towns had not the city come up here and bought out all the ranches and dried them up.

This phase of the question is expected to form the basis of some long and vigorous discussion.

After the figures had been given out, the meeting adjourned, for lunch hour and during the lunch hour the townspeople held a hurried huddle to determine just what course of action to follow.

The totals offered on the towns individually were as follows: When the afternoon session was resumed Jess Hession as chairman of the valley committee announced that the figures submitted by the city were too low and that if they were final it would be no use to continue the negotiations further. He made one exception in the case of Lone Pine, where, he said, the figures appeared to be in harmony with the townspeople's idea of a fair price, that is to say about five times the assessed valuation. As to the other towns, the city's prices ranged from two and two-tenths to two and eight-tenths times the assessed valuation.

Van Norman and A. J. Ford, speaking for the city, reiterated other statements that it was no use to consider assessed valuations because in the city's opinion the assessed valuations were not fair and equitable. However, if the valley committee would study the individual properties and the prices fixed in the survey and could show where they were too low, the city would be glad to reconsider, they said.

The townspeople felt that it was unfair to fix prices as of present day values because the values had gone down solely because of the city's activities up here. The city replied with a report from one of its experts covering some twenty towns over California showing that, land values in most of them had decreased since 1923. This was to offset the contention of the valley that their values would have increased had it not been for the city. In other words, said one of the valley men, "you are arguing that California is deteriorating. The All-Year Club doesn't seem to advertise it that way."

OPTIMISM PREVAILS

The committee will meet again August 3 to receive the completed and bound volumes of individual figures to study and to confer on later. Both Van Norman and Hession exchanged expressions of confidence and a desire on both sides to arrive at a successful conclusion of the matter and urged patience on the part of all concerned.

[The price Los Angeles is offering to purchase the following towns in Owens Valley.]

Lone Pine	\$1,295,567
Laws	\$70,180
Independence	\$935,515
Big Pine	\$719,655
Bishop	\$2,400,604

Totals are made up of figures on separate classes of property, such as land improvements, public utilities and public buildings. The purpose of the city in buying out the towns, lock, stock and barrel, is an effort to end the twenty-year-old water war with its attendant litigation.