



SANTA YNEZ VALLEY COALITION

ISSUE BRIEF

Introduction

Local government's most important functions are protecting the quality of life and public safety for all of its citizens while assisting in the creation of economic opportunity. In the Santa Ynez Valley in Santa Barbara County, a single special interest is seeking the ability to develop massive commercial and residential development on a large parcel of agricultural land it owns. The potential development of this property is on a scale never before seen in the Santa Ynez Valley and threatens property values, the economic viability of the surrounding area and will create a tax burden on all County citizens. A potential additional impact includes exacerbating existing drinking water shortages resulting from potentially unprecedented demand.

Issue

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, a small tribal community consisting of less than 150 members, is seeking federal action that would add the Camp 4 property, 1,400 acres of private land currently zoned for agricultural use to their reservation. Doing so would allow the Tribe to circumvent local and state land use regulations on this land and build large commercial, high-density housing and even industrial developments with no consideration of existing land use plans carefully crafted over many years by local government and residents. Every private property owner is required to comply with these plans.

The Santa Ynez Valley Community Plan is the result of over ten years of collaborative efforts by the community and the County to create land use guidelines. The federal government intervention the Tribe is seeking will render this plan irrelevant.

The potential adverse financial impacts of converting this private land to trust status are significant. Existing private property owners will see their property values reduced and residents will inevitably pay higher taxes on devalued land to address the potential demands on public infrastructure such as roads and increased law enforcement costs that would result from potentially unchecked development on the Camp 4 property.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Process

The Tribe applied to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for the Camp 4 property to be acquired by the federal government and held in Trust for their exclusive use. The BIA has administratively approved this application, and the matter is currently under appeal and is the subject of pending litigation.

If this federal process succeeds, County and state planning, zoning and land use laws and regulation will no longer apply to the Camp 4 property.

Federal Legislation - H.R. 1157

The Tribe is also seeking special interest legislation in Congress that would short-circuit the existing Fee-to-Trust administrative and legal process. If the bill, HR 1157, passes, this land would automatically be acquired by the federal government and held in trust for the benefit of the Tribe and become part of the reservation.

The primary Congressional sponsor of H.R. 1157 does not represent the Santa Ynez Valley in Congress. His constituents are 500 miles from Santa Barbara County.

Conversely, the locally elected Congressional representative opposes this bill and the usurping of local control of land use policies.

Impact of Federal Action

If Camp 4 becomes a part of the reservation, either through BIA action or as a result of federal legislation such as H.R. 1157, state and local government planning, and zoning laws and regulations would not apply. The Tribe will be able to develop this land in any manner it sees fit – including high-density subdivisions, commercial and industrial facilities without the input of the local governments such as Santa Barbara County, community stakeholders and the public.

Santa Barbara County

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors created an Ad-Hoc Committee to engage with the Tribe on issues related to Camp 4 and other properties. The topics under consideration by the Ad-Hoc Committee have far-reaching implications for the future quality of life for the residents of the Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Barbara County. Presumably, the Committee will develop recommendations for consideration by the entire Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors and could impact long-range land use plans carefully drafted over many years.

The Ad-Hoc Committee has previously met nine times, and future meetings are scheduled. These meetings are open to the public.

Solution

The Tribe's stated housing needs are important and the local community is clear in its willingness to work with the Tribe to address them. But federal intervention taking the Camp 4 property into trust allowing unrestricted development will inflict devastating impacts on existing property owners and irreparably harm the rural and agricultural characteristics of the Santa Ynez Valley.

For Further Information

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