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SYV Coalition meeting on Camp 4 draws crowd

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About 100 people attend a Santa Ynez Valley Coalition meeting Thursday night to provide information about the group's opposition to the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians' efforts to have the Camp 4 property taken into federal trust.

About 100 people turned out Thursday night at a Santa Ynez Valley Coalition community information meeting addressing the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians' effort to have the tribe's Camp 4 property taken into federal trust.

The meeting was as much a rally for opponents of the tribe's fee-to-trust effort as it was a dissemination of information about the recent history of the property, or the administrative, legislative and legal actions that have been taken over the issue.

After presentations by coalition members, they took turns answering written questions submitted by audience members who gathered in the Large Hall of the Solvang Veterans Memorial Building.

Coalition spokesman Mike Brady set the stage by outlining the group's opposition to having Camp 4 taken into trust by the federal government, which would allow it to become part of the Chumash reservation and thus put it outside local government's ability to regulate its use.

"To date we have not seen ... any mechanism or a willingness by the tribe to limit land use on the reservation," Brady said. "That's why we oppose Camp 4 fee to trust."

C.J. Jackson, representing Santa Ynez Valley Concerned Citizens, one of the organizations that makes up the coalition, tried to pump up the crowd.

"I'm going to be a cheerleader ... I'm going to deputize you to spread the message, and the message is: 'This is not a done deal,'" Jackson said. "The fat lady ain't singin', Elvis has not left the building and there's no body in the casket.

"This has always been about land use ... preserving the character of the community and the environmental elements that make this place special," he said.

Chumash representatives have said the land was purchased to provide housing for tribal members and their descendants as well as a tribal center, and they want that land to be part of the reservation, which is a separate and sovereign nation.

Jackson said the tribe's goal is to create "an enclave" that's not bound by state and county rules and regulations and that doesn't contribute funding to pay for services needed for issues that will spill off the property.

"Commercial development is a real and viable threat," he said. "We want them to have houses and a center, but in accord with responsible land use planning."

He said there is no need for putting the land into trust to develop housing and the center on the 1,400 acres of land that's currently in an agricultural preserve located on the east side of Highway 154 north of Highway 246.

He also criticized legislation introduced three times by Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, that Jackson said would "circumvent the decision" made administratively.

Jackson said there was a reason the first two bills didn't pass.

"They're listening," he said of Congress. "We're not alone in this, and we need your help going forward."

Leslie Mosteller, of the coalition, said activity is taking place on four fronts.

At the federal level, when the acting deputy secretary of the interior approved taking Camp 4 into trust, it extinguished the appeals of several individuals and communities, overriding their rights to due process, she said.

But she noted the decision has not been published in the Federal Register or on the government websites, and several administrative appeals are pending.

Santa Barbara County has filed a lawsuit over the decision, Mosteller said, but that has been put on hold pending the outcome of the administrative appeals.

She said some believe LaMalfa's introduction of House Resolution 1491 in March is a signal that the Chumash have some doubt about the outcome of the administrative decision.

But she noted the county staff has continued to negotiate behind the scenes with Chumash representatives over the Camp 4 and other land use issues, and the coalition expects the public meetings of the Board of Supervisors' ad hoc committee and Chumash to resume soon.

Richard Kline, who has filed appeals of the Bureau of Indian Affairs decisions, gave the audience a plan of action to oppose the Camp 4 fee-to-trust effort.

He told them to stay informed by visiting the coalition's website and signing up for email updates and stay engaged through peer-to-peer advocacy and speaking at county meetings.

He advised them to communicate with policymakers, and "when they do something right, let them know"; write letters to the editors of newspapers; and to donate to the coalition to support its efforts.

"We are willing to work with the Chumash to achieve their goal," Brady said, summing up the presentation. "We encourage them to come forward and state that is their goal."

During the question-and-answer session, audience member Larry Jett said he lives 1,000 feet from the border of Camp 4, he and his neighbors use well water and said that a Chumash site plan shows millions of square feet of commercial development there.

"If they start building all this ... I'm not going to have water," he said. "My neighbors aren't going to have water."

Later, Kline agreed such a development would have a major impact.

"If this goes through, it would change the entire character of this Valley," he said. "I mean, this (site) is bigger than Solvang."