

Chino Hills files lawsuit over Tres Hermanos decision

By Marianne Napoles | Posted: Saturday, September 16, 2017 8:00 am

The City of Chino Hills will file a lawsuit against the City of Industry over its purchase of Tres Hermanos, the 2,500-acre ranch on both sides of Grand Avenue in Chino Hills and Diamond Bar.

City attorney Mark Hensley made the announcement after meeting with the council behind closed doors on Tuesday.

Mr. Hensley said the lawsuit will also be filed against the oversight board governing the sale of the land, the State Department of Finance, and the successor agency to the Industry redevelopment agency.

The City of Diamond Bar has not made any specific decision, but is considering all options, said city manager Dan Fox.

The oversight board on Aug. 24 voted 4-3 to sell the property for \$41.65 million to be used for a renewable energy project, open space, public use, and preservation.

City of Industry officials said it will build a solar farm, hiking trails and open space for people to enjoy.

Not transparent

Chino Hills city manager Rad Bartlam said the City of Industry has been less than open with its intentions. He said his city had to file a public records request and analyze thousands of pages to learn that a solar farm was being proposed.

Mr. Bartlam said Chino Hills has a general plan that designates the game plan for the property.

Chino Hills would allow 467 housing units on 1,750 acres.

Diamond Bar's general plan would allow 624 units on 700 acres.

Mayor Ray Marquez said Industry's documents show a 444-megawatt solar facility which he said would cover most of the property, if not all, and would be highly visible from Grand Avenue.

When asked if the solar facility would cover most of the property, a City of Industry spokesperson stated that the city entered into an agreement with a private entity exploring the possibility of a solar farm, hiking trails, and open space. "It is our understanding that the company is looking at different options for solar but nothing has yet been proposed to the City nor approved by the City."

Mr. Hensley said there are a number of issues that will be litigated including Industry's failure to present the project to the Chino Hills planning commission to see if it is consistent with the general plan.



Paul Phillips

City of Industry city manager Paul Phillips (left) and Chino Hills city manager Rad Bartlam (right) at the meeting where the Tres Hermanos land was sold.

An Industry spokesperson said the City of Industry on Sept. 1 provided a letter to the Chino Hills planning commission after the oversight board made its decision.

“Any communication with the planning commission prior to the oversight board’s decision would have been premature,” the speaker said.

The spokesperson added: “The City has also publicly committed to following all local, state and federal laws and regulations applicable for the potential use of the property.”

Chino Hills resident Jim Gallagher, spokesman for the grass-roots group Save Tres Hermanos Ranch, told the council that residents do not want to see houses, roads, and traffic on the ranch.

“Tres Hermanos is a critical natural area with a natural waterway,” he said. “Our residents say yes to open space and green infrastructure.”

Mr. Gallagher said he agreed that a 444-megawatt facility occupying the entire site is too much and he expressed his concerns to City of Industry city manager Paul Philips.

“Paul told me it has yet to be determined but Chino Hills indicates otherwise in the documents they unearthed,” he said.

Mr. Gallagher said residents have mixed perceptions about a solar farm.

“People think it will look like the solar mirrors in Las Vegas,” he said.

Councilwoman Cynthia Moran said it is important that residents know why the city is filing the lawsuit.

“The decision by the oversight board is not necessarily a good one,” she said. “People are quick to say they don’t want houses but they have to understand the reality of this situation.”

She is calling for a city meeting to explain how the decision will impact Chino Hills.

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Save Tres Hermanos to meet Sept. 27

The monthly grass-roots meeting for “Save Tres Hermanos Ranch” will be held Wednesday, Sept. 27 at 7 p.m. at Oakmont of Chino Hills, 14837 Peyton Drive.

The group will discuss the purchase of Tres Hermanos by the City of Industry and what it could mean to Chino Hills and Diamond Bar.

Information: Jim Gallagher, 518-9318.