

THOUSAND PALMS COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes
April 30, 2009

Council Members in Attendance: Karen Esposito, Greg Pinney and Patricia Saleh
Chairman Roy Nokes and Vice Chairman Robert Alcumbrac absent.

Karen Esposito, acting chairwoman, called the meeting to order at 6:15 PM. After the roll call and the Pledge of Allegiance she read the minutes of the last meeting. They were accepted as corrected.

Denys Arcuri, legislative assistant to 4th District Supervisor Roy Wilson, outlined the format of tonight's scheduled discussion on the Workforce Housing Project with each interested party to be given three minutes to state their questions on the project. He also stated that the 4th District website contains news on any current cases of swine flu. There are two known cases to date.

Staff Reports

Sheriff's Department: Sgt. Horkeo stood in for Lt. Pinon in reporting that calls for service diminished from 2,061 in 2008 to 1,980 in 2008. The volume of crimes has decreased in Thousand Palms in all categories but burglaries. Thousand Palms and the other incorporated areas will now be guarded by two-man teams five days a week plus one deputy funded by a grant from the Agua Caliente Indian Tribe for Thousand Palms alone.

Code Enforcement

Lorana Diaz, our new Thousand Palms Code Enforcement representative, said that there are 177 open cases in Thousand Palms. She said that accumulated trash and inoperable vehicles are the biggest problems in Thousand Palms. She said that complaints are rising, however, on excessive animals, in particular roosters and chickens. Animal codes can be found on the Code Enforcement website. She said that the local recycling plant will take autos in for free and even pay \$45 for them.

Fire Department

Gretchen Gonzales, Fire Captain of the Thousand Palms Fire Department, reported that among the 101 total calls that came in this month there were 55 medical calls, 8 crashes, 2 excess vegetation calls, 3 refuse calls and 5 alarms. Due to the County's proposed budget cuts the purchase of a large ladder truck slated to go in the new fire station might have to be put off for about 3 years. The new station is still scheduled for completion in October 2009. They are a week ahead of schedule

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Don Donnelly, Thousand Palms resident, brought up that he'd read that 15 fire stations would have to be closed. Denys Arcuri said that the budget cuts are proposed cuts and it is not known yet which stations will be closed or if they will be closed

Old Business

Workforce Housing Project

Tom Hodgen of the Palm Desert Development Company stated that his company is affiliated with Western Community Housing, a non-profit organization. They currently own and operate 14 affordable communities.

All communities are run with house rules on a three-strike policy where the rules must be respected or renters will be evicted. There will be a 24-hour guard and camera surveillance on property. These gated communities, he said, are crime-free, drug-free zones with keypad access.

Housing affordability is based on 30% of a family's income, and 40% of former renters become first-time home buyers.

In Thousand Palms the rents will range from \$395 to \$844 per month for a two-bedroom apartment, and \$452 to \$972 for a three-bedroom, depending on a family's income.

Prospective renters include those earning between \$18,000 and \$41,000 per year. Among those in this salary range include school teachers, nurses, fire fighters, service workers, gardeners and sheriff's deputies.

The project will run from Del Norte to El Centro to Industrial Park to Robert Road. There are no other affordable housing units in Thousand Palms. It will be a low density project in that the zoning currently allows 220 units but they will be building only 160. As part of the project they will complete Robert Road and make flood control improvements by positioning units apart from one another, and 15 acres will be given to the Desert Recreation District for future development by the DRD. Buildings will be placed 400 feet away from current residences and the slope of the existing land will allow current residences to maintain their view.

The initial phase will include 10 buildings, all two-story, with eight units per building. The project will include a gym, after school and educational programs. It will also be a green project, exceeding Title 22 standards by 20%.

Possible Objections:

- Will project decrease property values?
Answer: No study has ever shown that affordable housing reduces property values.
- Will affordable housing put more stress on the services and streets?
Answer: Because of the design and layout there will be more people housed per acre so the stress on the system will be lessened and crime reduced. There will be less density than a possible single-family housing project on the site.
- Will people be moving in and out of the project all the time?
Answer: When rents remain stable tenants move less often.
- Who makes sure people follow the rules?
Answer: This project will be professionally managed and maintained, gated and secured. The number of people living in a household is monitored monthly so grandpa and grandma can't come and "visit."

- What could be done if the management doesn't keep up the project?

Answer: There are third-party investors involved and they would be upset. We get developer credits and investors pay us cash for tax credits so they provide incentive to us to keep them up because we want investors to do more projects. Also, a call to the 4th District Supervisor would be in order.

The State of California can be sued by the Federal government if the state does nothing to develop low-income housing. Supervisor Wilson has always stated that there is a lack of safe affordable housing in the District.

Objections to Project:

Resident Tim Petek: He is against it because it will create more traffic and congestion.

Resident Israel Esmeralda: This is a good project when the economy is good but if the teachers or firemen lose their jobs will they be evicted?

Resident who is a teacher at Raymond Cree: The families are hard workers but latchkey kids will commit crimes and we'd have a nest of them here. Answer: If kids commit crimes the whole family will have to move.

Nancy Gentry of the Thousand Palms Library asked how many children will be going to school and using the library? Answer: There will be a detailed presentation at the next meeting on how low-income housing has increased property values in the area.

Karen Esposito asked what should be discussed at the next meeting. Denys Arcuri said that we need to ask some questions of the Riverside County Planning Department. It was also proposed by PDDC that council members could be shown the low-income projects they've built in the area. Patricia Saleh asked what the local businesses might think about this project.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia Saleh, acting council secretary