

Thousand Palms Community Council Minutes

Thousand Palms Community Center
31189 Robert Rd, Thousand Palms, CA 92276

March 31, 2011

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In Attendance:	X	Karen Esposito, Chairman
	X	Christopher Mitchell, Council Member
	X	Patricia Saleh, Secretary
	X	Roy Nokes, Council Member
		Bob Alcumbrac, Council Member
	X	Michael Gialdini, Liaison to 4 th District Supervisor John Benoit
Call to Order:		<p>Chairman Karen Esposito called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. She led the Pledge of Allegiance.</p> <p>Michael Gialdini installed Christopher Mitchell as the new Thousand Palms Community Council member replacing Greg Pinney. Mitchell is finance director for Sun Line Transit and has been attending Council meetings for a couple of years.</p> <p>The minutes of 2/24/2011 were approved as written.</p> <p>Esposito called for Staff Reports</p>
STAFF REPORTS	A.	Fourth District Supervisor Liaison Mike Gialdini
		Community Council Terms
		Gialdini talked about terms for the five council members. He will allow new people to apply. They have rescheduled the terms so that not all positions end at the same date.
		Rio del Sol was repaved this week and Varner will be repaved.
		Read correspondence.
		a) Read a letter from someone in Thousand Palms against the County but it was unclear what the letter meant. Gialdini advised attendees to be sure when they write a letter to the Supervisor that the intent of the letter is clear.
		<p>b) Letter to Mary Bono forwarded to Supervisor Benoit against Cathedral City getting sphere of influence, saying Supervisor Benoit doesn't care about Thousand Palms like Roy Wilson did. Gialdini said that this is categorically wrong; he does care.</p> <p>Community member asked Gialdini if the Supervisor has any response to this letter against the sphere of influence. Gialdini said that meetings have been being held for over two years now and the Council and other community boards have voted in favor of the Spheres</p>
		Esposito reminded the audience that all discussion must be directed to the chair.
	B.	Riverside County Sheriff's Department
		Reporting: Lt. Bill Sullivan, assistant Palm Desert chief of police

	<p>Statistics: Feb – 1 assault, 3 thefts and 111 traffic stops have taken place since the beginning of the year.</p>
	<p>Deputy Willow, head of Gang Task Force</p>
	<p>Tri-Palms search warrant was executed in the family section. Deputy Chris Lauer assisted. Four arrests were made, all local Thousand Palms (TP) residents. Stolen property from La Quinta was recovered along with one ounce of methamphetamines, cash and a sawed-off shot gun.</p> <p>Sullivan interjected that he really appreciates Supervisor Benoit's help on this. It was Benoit who made this task force possible.</p> <p>Gang Task Force – Lauer, continued TP doesn't have a big problem with gangs but they are beginning to see graffiti signifying a gang is getting started here in TP and the Task Force wants to nip it in the bud. They do traffic stops, process search warrants, check networking web sites and do surveillance. Deputy goes out to the schools and if citizens think surveillance is needed they will follow through. They want to identify all gangs in the valley and their members. Most of the time they end up in Indio, Coachella and Desert Hot Springs because those are the Valley hotspots for gangs. Two years after the Gang Task Force was started they now have three taskforces that cover all of Riverside County and 391 gang members have been identified in Riverside County. There is a member from each police department on the Force.</p> <p>In the Coachella Valley we have 25 gangs, some Hispanic, some black, some mixed, some prison gangs. Is it illegal to be a gang member in California? No, it is not. If you've committed crimes it's illegal to be part of a gang. A gang is an ongoing organization or group with three or more members bearing gang logos, etc. The new gang in TP is an Hispanic street gang called Mil Palmas. This gang began in 1995 on Calle Jessica to rival the Barrio Gang in Cathedral City. They remained dormant for many years but now they're tagging again and the GTF is watching this. Lauer is going to conduct probation searches on probationers and encourage community members to report any crimes, especially if they think there's a gang involved. He said that it is very important for citizens to remember that if a citizen reports something that allows the GTF to obtain a search warrant it is considered reliable information. To report gang activity, call the Sheriff's department. On Marin street, audience member Mike Ascani reported that gang members tagged an electrical box and his wall. He filed a report on that. These are school kids, he said. Gang members are usually 13 to 17 years of age. They usually get probation. Another attendee said that New Year's was the quietest on record. He asked Sullivan how they did it. Sullivan said they had every capable deputy out on the streets.</p> <p>Don Donnelly said that there is an issue before the Board of Supervisors concerning public safety funding. He hopes that this Council goes on record supporting Supervisor Benoit's policy that there will be no cuts in public safety in the County of Riverside in the budget that is before them. He hopes the Council will consider this for a future agenda item. He asked Esposito for her opinion on this. She said that everyone on the council would support this funding. Gialdini concurred that everyone would like as many police as possible, but the County will be \$100 million in the hole, and if the State takes money away they will be \$300 million in the hole. They're already down to bare bones. Although Benoit has a long history of law enforcement it will be unlikely that they will be able to keep everyone in public safety if they're going to balance the budget. If the Sheriffs don't cut their budgets or some departments then the Supervisors will have to close many departments that exist today. A sheriff would have to take a mentally ill person to Riverside, out of the Coachella Valley, because there is no place to house them</p>

		<p>here. The situation is “dire.” They will be going to a tiered pension system. Gialdini said that we can make a resolution at the next meeting. Sullivan said that every deputy out there is going to give us 150% no matter what the budget is.</p> <p>Esposito asked if there are more prison gangs near prisons than not. Sullivan said no, because there are not a lot of residences near state prisons. Gangs are run inside the prisons. Mexican mafia gang members have nothing bad happen to them in prison and they offer street insurance to gang members. Gang members pay taxes as an insurance policy to the mafia gang because they know that sooner or later they are going to jail. The TP 13 were kids who had started to pay tribute to the Mexican mafia so when they go to prison they won’t get stabbed and raped. That brought our attention way up. We want our kids to grow up and be lawyers and doctors and architects; they want their members to become mafia members because after they do their time in prison they will simply live off the dues the others pay. Mexican mafia runs the prisons south of Bakersfield.</p>
	C.	Code Enforcement
		Reporting: Riverside County Code Enforcement Supervisor Dave Lawless
		<p>Medical Marijuana Dispensaries: Four have been identified in TP and two in other parts of the County. These are only zoning violations Lawless said and not criminal violations. They are working their way through the process on them and they will eventually end up in court as criminal offenses. (Gialdini explained previously that the County is not closing these dispensaries down at present because violaters will end up in criminal court and the courts have not yet decided, because of the voters in California already approving medical marijuana, if these cases can be prosecuted criminally.)</p> <p>There are 111 Code Enforcement cases open in TP, he said. Among those are substandard building conditions, illegal land use, vehicle abatement, trash, 63 foreclosed homes they must check. On the positive side there are also a lot more sales of these homes, which is good.</p> <p>TP Community Cleanup was a great success. 287 residents showed up; 332 trips delivering trash = 36 tons of trash. 3.5 tons of tires.</p> <p>Esposito said that she’s heard there are a lot of businesses operating out of their homes, in particular auto repair. She asked how the community can take action. Lawless said to report them and their names will be kept anonymous. Nokes said some major corporations were started in their garages so he’s kind of “touchy” about not allowing businesses in their homes. Lawless said that home businesses are allowed but when people are creating traffic to and from their property that’s where they get complaints. Many businesses don’t come into Code Enforcement radar because they’re not creating any problems that bother others. Mitchell asked if Code Enforcement could present the home occupation use standards.</p> <p>Sharon Ballard said that along with trash day people ask about a public shredding event. She was wondering if that could be added to the next trash day.</p> <p>Steve (sp) Nunez said he missed trash day because there was conflicting info on the dates at the last council meeting. Gialdini concurred and said that the info was e-mailed to everyone we have e-mail addresses for so he’d like more e-mail addresses and a signup sheet was provided.</p>
	D.	CalFire/Roy Wilson Fire Station in Thousand Palms
		Reporting: Fire Captain Gretchen Gonzales

		Fire Department had to go to a fire – no report
	E.	Other County Departments
		Gialdini thanked Roy Nokes and John Stephens for help in identifying the street lights that were out. IID helped in replacing 31 lights that were out.
UNFINISHED BUSINESS	A.	Enterprise Zone Resolution
		Presenter Mark Weber, manager of CVEZA
		Many people in CV are suffering from unemployment. These tax credits encourage businesses to hire employees. He went over the Resolution and asked the Council to pass a resolution supporting the Zone. Patricia Saleh moved that the Council support CVEZA; Mitchell seconded. Unanimous ayes. Don Donnelly said that this issue is on the governor’s cut list and it’s not the time to cut Enterprise Zones. Weber concurred. Saleh signed the resolution and indicated 4 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstaining, and 1 absent.
	B.	Redevelopment Agency Design Guidelines
		Liza Lizarraga Presenter
		Reporting on the architectural guidelines workshop after the February 24, 2011 Council meeting. Not many surveys were returned, but as of those that were Scottsdale Old Town Desert was the top choice. Due to the length of the March council meeting the Guidelines workshop scheduled for this meeting was postponed until next meeting.
	C.	Cathedral City Sphere of Influence Update
		Leisa Lukes, Cathedral City Planning Director, Presenter
		<p>In January LAFCO approved the original sphere of influence up to Rio del Sol Rd. minus the multi-species habitat zones. They’ve had many comments from the TP community but the consensus was that more approved than disapproved, although there was division. The second sphere will include all of the rest of Thousand Palms minus the species habitat area and the area Palm Desert has in its sphere immediately west of Washington Street. The second sphere, she said, “Is a high priority for our council.” LAFCO will take action on this in the fall of this year, she reported. She said that Cathedral City Councilman Greg Pettis and Cathedral City Development and Community Outreach Director Andy Hall were on hand to answer questions. Hall said that Cathedral City’s analysis will in the long run help Thousand Palms and there are many steps to go through before annexation so there will be no surprises. Esposito asked if when the sphere request goes to LAFCO there will be public notice. He said that there would be and land-use designations will parallel those of the County.</p> <p>Nokes thanked Cathedral City for their hard work on this and Saleh concurred. Attendee John Stephens asked that the annexation notice be placed in The Desert Sun rather than a newspaper outside the area. Lukes said that the scheduled April 6, 2011 Planning Commission notice on the approval of Cathedral City (CC) land-use designations has gone out to as many people as possible and been posted in the Community Center. There will be two public hearings in CC about this. This will not change anything in Thousand Palms; the County will oversee all zoning in the community. In May CC staff will be doing all of the TP analysis. Attendee Nunez said that the sphere of influence is fine but annexation is not and the TP Council, in his opinion, does not represent the opinion of the community. Gialdini said that it is residents’ responsibility to contact the council members and go to town hall meetings and discuss with them what the community’s opinions are. There are some council seats up for new members. He said if Nunez would like to be on the</p>

		<p>council he can apply.</p> <p>A sphere of influence, Gialdini said, merely gives CC the right to comment on a project that might eventually be in their city. Mitchell asked if a community vote is required for annexation to be approved. Gialdini deferred to Saleh to clarify that people must protest per the rules of LAFCO before a vote will be authorized.</p> <p>Ascani and attendee Pam McKay asked to redefine the votes needed to stop annexation. Saleh replied that the LAFCO Web site has all of the rules posted. Nokes told Nunez that community members protested these spheres of influence for over two and a half years, but “LAFCO shot us down.”</p>
NEW BUSINESS	A.	GML, Landscape
		Presenter Juan Perez
		GML is building a 3,500 square foot commercial building on Rio del Sol. They’ve received Building and Safety approval, Environmental Health, etc. Gialdini said it’s being processed through Planning but it hasn’t been approved yet. They do HOA work. They need a “ground zero” to work out of and be professional. Nokes said he’s read and reread these plans and can’t find anything wrong. Mitchell moved to approve. Saleh seconded. Approved unanimously in concept.
		SunLine Transit Agency
		Presenters: Harvey Edwards, Kevin Fleming, architect
		Fleming said that Sun Line covers the whole Coachella Valley and they’ve been working out of portable buildings for the last 20 years so they need a new administration building. The plan up for approval at this meeting is a master plan that incorporates future plans as well. There will be 100 parking spaces for staff right off Harry Oliver Trail. The building will be 24,000 square feet. Public functions will be up front and administration will be separate. The back portion is two stories. Nokes asked about solar generation. Fleming said that they’re looking at wind generation and they’ll look at solar in the second phase of the administration building. Fleming said that the parking structure the Council has already approved will have solar panels on it. There is no funding for it now but they are hoping it will come in. It was engineered for solar, he said; all the conduits are there; we’re getting close but it isn’t there yet. Donnelly asked about where they’re hoping to get funding for the building. Edwards said Federal and State funds will be used. As a public transit agency we’ve been able to put funds away for this so there are already funds set aside. Councilman Mitchell said that the majority of funds have been secured but they’re aware that the governor is always taking away funds and they’re required to take this into account.
		Safe House of the Desert
PUBLIC COMMENTS		Kathrine McIntire, director of Safe House, Tim Morneau architect
		Safe House will be constructing a new housing center for 18 to 24 year olds on the site of the old fire station on La Canada in Thousand Palms, adjacent to the Thousand Palms Chamber of Commerce and the present Safe House building. This new facility will house up to 20 young people, kids who have aged out of the foster system and have no family support for housing or to get launched in a

career. This will provide up to 18 months of housing, and jobs training to try and break the cycle of homelessness.

Tim Morneau said the architecture is two-story, 16-unit rental dwelling type building. It is directly north of the existing facility so it will be an expansion of the existing facility and complimentary to the existing building. "We wanted to make it private for the neighbors and the youth so we centered the building," he said. All the windows that are facing the exterior of the complex that could typically look into the neighbors properties contain bumpouts. The windows that are on the outside will be translucent rather than transparent glass so neither the neighbors nor the student will have to worry about being seen through the windows but the translucent windows will allow light to enter through the space to give them natural daylight for a better environment for the students. The architecture also creates a large buffer at the front that will be heavily landscaped and thereby increase the privacy. The stucco was selected to go with the colors in the area. They've studied the neighbors' homes and color palette to see which colors are being used in the area and they noted a muted palette so those colors will be used. Solar fittings are being used so solar can be implemented in the future.


Mitchell asked about what "transitional housing" means and if students can come back after 18 months. Morneau said that there will be six units on the bottom for handicapped youth who will be able to stay longer. The current facility has 24-hour awake staff so a manager's unit is all that will be placed in the new building.

Esposito asked what age group will be housed. McIntire said that it is for 18-24 year olds. She said that technically someone could stay in those indefinitely. Esposito said that because the architect has considered the intrusiveness of this project that perhaps he felt that this wouldn't be too acceptable to the neighbors. Morneau said that this wasn't the case but they do want to be good neighbors. Esposito said that she's only concerned about the neighborhood and the influx of the people and how it will affect the neighborhood. McIntire said that there was only one house in the neighborhood and it was gang infested and loaded with graffiti. Nokes said that there are actually a lot of questions about this project. He said that said that he supported the original Safe House project but these are troubled adults. Morneau said that these young people are not on parole, not felons, etc. These are mostly kids terming out in the foster care system. Nokes said that he is in support of youth but these are adults and they are different because they have the responsibility to look out for themselves. He said that the community needs to know all the ramifications involved in the project, including that the adults on property will not be entirely from Thousand Palms and that other communities are not providing facilities for these young adults. He thinks it's asking a lot of Thousand Palms to take on so many of these problems when other cities aren't providing the same types of facilities. McIntire said that all residents have to be drug tested and must be homeless. They must abide by their regulations. They must be going to school. Once they get a job 50% of everything they earn must go into a savings account.

Nokes said that he noticed that some of these are one bedroom and some are two bedrooms. McIntire said that some of these young adults are lonely and they've determined that they might be better off with another person in their room. That will be assessed, she said, since they're coming out of foster care. Care of these young adults is funded by grants and donations.

Saleh asked if there are maladjusted children there and McIntire said that they are not necessarily maladjusted but homeless. Saleh also asked if any psychological evaluations have been done on the translucent windows? Morneau said they will only be used in the bedrooms. Nokes asked if these are windows that will open.

		<p>Morneau said they must be able to be opened for fire safety reasons. Desert Recreation coordinator Manny Rujo said that he has observed that kids from Safe House are never a problem. Sharon Ballard said that these kids come to the library too and they're happy to have them. Nokes said that it's a tight squeeze to get into the building as it is designed for the fire department to have access. Morneau said that side yards are consistent with local zoning codes. Nokes said, "We will have to live with this project for a long time," so he said, "You're putting adults into the close proximity with the Emergency Shelter kids. Have you looked into this?" McIntire said that older kids are not allowed on the property unless there's something going on. Saleh said that translucent windows might be hard to live with for some of the residents since this is their only personal space and they'll probably open the windows, so the "privacy" for residents and homes nearby will be eliminated. McIntire said she doesn't want them to be in their bedrooms too much; that they need to be at school or at work or being part of the program. Nokes moved to accept the plan in concept. Mitchell seconded. Unanimously accepted.</p>
COMMITTEE REPORTS	A.	Desert Recreation District Report
		Reporting: Manny Rujo , temporary Thousand Palms Community Center Coordinator
		<p>Rujo said that Thousand Palms Community Center Coordinator Rob Carson will hopefully be here for the next Community Council meeting since he's been feeling better and coming in much more. Rujo reported that the afterschool program still has 23 participants with 10 on scholarship. They've been enjoying field trips, going to "First Tee" to practice their golfing skills, etc. The majority of kids on spring break enrollment are on scholarship. Thirty-nine adults are enrolled in zumba; karate has 32 participants. The soccer field is being used by Xavier College Prep teams. Everything is booming at the community center, he said. Nokes said, "Great job." Rujo said, "All the credit goes to Rob for building it up all this time with his two hands."</p>
	B.	Thousand Palms Library
		Reporting: Sharon Ballard, head librarian
		<p>Ballard said that the Library is booming too. Circulation is up. "We're holding our own with a limited budget." New this month are computer classes for Word, Internet and E-Mail. The Library's biggest community event, Day of the Child, Day of the Book, is scheduled for Saturday, April 30, at 10:30 AM and volunteers are needed. Attendees will be offered free hotdogs and kids can win a free book just by reading a book. The Library will be working with the Community Center, she said, to put this event on. If teenagers or adults that would like to win prizes for being volunteers, give the library a call.</p>
PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS		<p>Palm Desert Development, Affordable Housing – Thomas Hodgin. Hodgin said that everything is going as scheduled and there's a new contact for updates on the project: Travis Simpson, construction supervisor, at 951-722-8267. Hodgin said it's gratifying to see so many projects on the Thousand Palms approval calendar. Palm Desert Development has already put in temporary power for the project and is evicting some of the local reptiles on the site, one being a seven-footer which was the biggest rattler he has seen. PD Development will be bringing in improvement in about 60 days. They'll come here monthly with construction</p>

		<p>progress reports.</p> <p>Plans for Whitewater Prison Don Donnelly asked that the Council go on record for or against the prison being considered for the Whitewater area for next Council meeting. Gialdini said that the Supervisors have agreed to wait until the study is done on the impact on other cities before the TP Council votes on it. There will be a survey presented to the Council with questions decided by a subcommittee. It will be three to five years from now that it will be built if it is approved. There will be additional meetings held after the survey goes out.</p>
Agenda Items for Next Meeting		a) Design guidelines workshop.
ADJOURN MEETING		Nokes moved to adjourn. Mitchell seconded. Adjourned at 8:45 PM.
NEXT MEETING		April 28, 2011, 6:00 PM
		<p>Respectfully submitted,</p> <p> Patricia Saleh, Thousand Palms Community Council Secretary, 760-343-2440</p>
		Thousand Palms Design Guidelines Workshop after the meeting cancelled due to time constraints.