

(for Viewpoint)

Outpouring of Opposition to Rudyville

More than 150 people spilled out of the Community Room at the Borrego Springs High School on April 7, 2016 for the Public Hearing to consider the Property Specific Request for a General Plan Amendment to “up zone” Rudyville from 17 ten-acre lots to 170 one-acre lots. Several observers noted the size of the crowd exceeded any meeting of the Community Sponsor Group in over a decade. Not one attendee spoke in favor of Rudyville’s Property Specific Request. The arguments against the request for “up zoning” were varied and compelling. To wit:

Why would Borrego Springs want more residential lots approved when there is presently an inventory of County-approved lots estimated to last for more than 30 years at the current rate of sales?

Why would Borrego Springs allow a residential development to be built in an active flood plain that produced a spectacular flood as recently as two years ago?

Why would Borrego Springs support the taking of private property by eminent domain for the construction of a flood control project to protect Rudyville that would direct floodwaters to other parts of our community, adversely impact state parkland, and be constructed at the expense of those neighbors from whom land had been taken?

Why would Borrego Springs place the profiteering interests of the owners of Rudyville above the interests of contiguous residents, the State Park, and the interests of the entire community and local economy?

Why would Borrego Springs want to place 170 septic systems within a major recharge corridor for the aquifer, our only source of water?

Why would Borrego Springs want to sacrifice habitat for the rare, listed species, such as burrowing owls, that reside on the Rudyville parcel?

Why would Borrego Springs want to sacrifice the iconic ocotillo forest, one of the largest, most accessible stands of mature ocotillos in the entire Southwest, that welcomes visitors into our community?

Why would Borrego Springs want an additional 170 acres of scraped desert in a high wind area, adding particulate matter to our air that is likely to exacerbate respiratory problems among local residents and reduce visibility across the scenic vistas that we enjoy and that attract visitors to our community?

With unusual, if not unprecedented, unanimity at the April 7th meeting of the Community Sponsor Group, Borregans provided a resounding, “Hell, no!” to all of the above.

However, there are three men who want all of the above to happen—Rudy Monica, Chris Brown, and David Davis—the owners of Rudyville. And these three men have the ear of at least three County Supervisors—Bill Horn, Greg Cox, and Ron Roberts, as it was these three Supervisors who voted in July 2012 to spend taxpayers’ money to perform the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) necessary to analyze this Property Specific Request to increase the allowable housing density of Rudyville. And these three supervisors will be present when this issue comes to a final vote at the end of 2017 or early 2018.

At that July 2012 meeting of the Board of Supervisors, there were more than 80 other Property Specific Requests that did not receive the support of three or more Supervisors, and therefore did not receive public money to move their requests further along the permitting process. Rudyville did. Rudyville was not one of the “winners” of this public money bonanza because of its merits, or because the myriad problems associated with it were not yet known. All of the above problems associated with Rudyville, and more, were presented in explicit detail to the County in writing in 2008 and reiterated at the 2012 meeting. Nevertheless, three Supervisors voted at that 2012 meeting to “award” Rudyville taxpayer money for the current analysis.

If Rudyville did not move forward in 2012 because of its merits, perhaps it did so because of politics. Perhaps Rudyville was among the 40+ winners of public money because one of the owners, Chris Brown, once worked for Bill Horn. Perhaps there are other political reasons that have yet to come to light that can explain why a project as problem-plagued as Rudyville received such favorable attention from the Supervisors. Whatever the specific reasons are, it is clear Rudyville has not moved forward because of its merits, but because of politics. And when it comes to politics, Borrego is challenged. We are far from the seat of power, in what is considered by many to be a thinly populated “desert wasteland.” Yet, as we have demonstrated in past public proceedings such as with the Sunrise Powerlink and the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, when we work together, we can make our voices heard.

County staff was directed by the Board of Supervisors to complete this current analysis of Rudyville for this request to “up zone,” and they have professionally carried out their responsibilities. Staff will carry back to the Powers That Be not only the specific comments we have made in writing and in oral testimony, but also the unprecedented turnout for this meeting of the Community Sponsor Group, its tenor, and its unanimous opposition to Rudyville. And still that will not be enough to ensure the travesty of Rudyville will not again “win” the votes of three Supervisors. Fortunately, we have some time and there are actions we can take on our own behalf now:

- 1) We can help County staff deliver the message of our opposition to Rudyville by now sending our letters to each of the five Supervisors, both in writing and by email (see box for names and addresses).
- 2) We can further our cause by continuing to organize as a community. Anyone wishing to receive periodic updates as the Rudyville saga continues to unfold, please add your email address to the Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy (TCDC) mailing list on the "Contact" tab at the TCDC website (www.tubbcaniondesertconservancy.org).
- 3) We can create a short video for distribution via social media and news sites documenting the spectacular desert habitat that is threatened by Rudyville. There are many living elsewhere who love the Anza-Borrego Desert and who visit Borrego Springs. They need to know about this threat to the beautiful old ocotillo forest and sand dune they often see as they drive to and from Borrego Springs. Anyone wishing to contribute photos or make a donation toward this video project may do so at the TCDC website.
- 4) We can grow our war chest in the event legal counsel is needed...again...to demonstrate our resolve that Rudyville is a very bad idea that should not be allowed to move forward. These donations may also be made at the TCDC website.

The decade old saga of Rudyville is not over. We have more "miles to go" before we can rest assured of success, but working together we will succeed in placing one of the most iconic vistas of our community beyond reach of the bulldozers' blade.

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