

Your Hometown: Desert Hot Springs

Environmental groups file suit to stop Palmwood

City Watch 03.FEB.07

Two environmental groups that had promised to challenge a major annexation development in Desert Hot Springs did just that on Wednesday when they filed suit to block a planned residential and commercial development known as Palmwood.

In a press release issued by one of two environmental groups announcing the suit, Jonathan Evans, staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said, "Desert Hot Springs was the lone holdout on the Habitat Conservation Plan last year. Now they're trying to annex land that's at the heart of the plan."

Battle lines appear to be drawn as at least two members of the Desert Hot Springs City Council say they will recommend the city defend against that suit.

"My recommendation will be that if the city is served, and I understand from the press release that it will be, that we give it to our city attorney. And my recommendation will be that we defend it vociferously," said Desert Hot Springs city council member Hank Hohenstein.

City Councilwoman Yvonne Parks, also in favor of the defending against the environmental suit, said "I would be very much in favor of fighting it."

The land where the annexation and Palmwood development is proposed is land coveted by other valley cities and state and local agencies as a set-aside area in a larger valley-wide conservation plan known as the MSHCP.

That plan was objected to by Desert Hot Springs. In a vote on the plan last summer the city became the lone hold-out effectively derailing the valley-wide conservation plan. That plan was to settle conflicts between builders and environmentalists overland use.

The city of Desert Hot Springs objected saying that it was their city that was giving up all the land for development while other valley cities were either already built-out or building on open land that should have also been set aside for the MSHCP plan.

Joan Taylor, local Conservation Chair for Sierra Club, the other environmental group bringing the suit, said "The city has already approved 10,000 not-as-yet built housing units which would more than double its population with no long-term ability to supply enough water, much less other essential services."

To allay concerns that a defense of the suit by the city will cost the city money, Parks said the Palmwood developer is holding the city harmless.

"Any lawsuit will be fought by and paid by Palmwood. It will not cost the city a dime," she said.

- Desert Local News

