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CITY COUNCIL ADDRESSES BASE EXPANSION, CIRCULATION PLAN, ADOBE SPRINGS DEVELOPMENT, AND PLANNING COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS AT ITS JAN. 27 MEETING

The Twentynine Palms City Council met in regular session on Tuesday, Jan. 27, with a full agenda and a nearly packed Council Chambers. Topping the list of public concerns on the agenda was an item regarding written comments to be submitted from the City Council addressing the base expansion plans for the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center.

Mayor Pro Tem Steve Flock and Councilman Jim Harris had attended a Jan. 24 meeting of the Citizens Alliance for Wonder Valley and listened to their concerns regarding the proposed base expansion to the east and south, which could potentially impact Amboy Road and private property in the area. Their input along with issues raised at the City Council meeting will be incorporated into the formal written comments from the City and submitted to the Dept. of the Navy this week, before the scoping period's deadline for comments on Jan. 30.

Among the concerns, reiterated by Councilmen Harris and Steve Spear, was the need to address cultural resources of the region, including Indian artifacts and historic cabins located in the area, along with impacts on water resources, air quality and dust levels, noise pollution, and potential toxins from ordnances. Spear also expressed safety concerns and hoped that the base will address any environmental impact on endangered species, including the desert tortoise.

Councilman John Cole suggested emphasizing the potential negative impact to the circulation of private and commercial vehicles on Amboy Road, which is an important access route into Twentynine Palms and the Morongo Basin from the east, and stressed its significance for local commuters to and from work as well as for deliveries of water and materials to Wonder Valley.

In reference to a previous comment by the City regarding the base expansion's "potential to increase Special Use Air Space," Cole suggested strongly emphasizing the significant impact to local air space, which could affect private and commercial pilots and possibly impact the future development of the Twentynine Palms Airport.

Mayor Pro Tem Flock agreed, saying "Twentynine Palms is the regional airport for the Morongo Basin. This is a regional issue." He advised working together on this issue with all the communities in the Morongo Basin.

After lengthy discussion, Council agreed on the points of concern and authorized City Manager Michael Tree to prepare the final letter of written comments to be signed by Mayor Joel Klink, adding points raised by the City Council and Citizens Alliance for Wonder Valley.

The City's official comments will be delivered to the Department of the Navy this week, before their deadline of Jan. 30. The items will then be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) being prepared for the project.

According to MCAGCC Community Liaison Jim Ricker, the EIS should be completed by Spring 2010, and another scoping period will be held at that time, with more opportunities for public comment.

In other agenda action, the Council adopted Resolution 09-01, approving the proposed Amendment to the Circulation Element of the General Plan as presented by City Staff, which includes an expanded bicycle system and revised designations for the City's roadways. One change stipulated in the approval was lowering the designation of Montoya Road on the western boundary of the City from a 44-ft. collector to a 36-ft. local road, in response to concerns from several residents of that area, including Philip Block representing the Southern California Vipassana Center.

The City Council gave praise and a unanimous vote to adopt Resolution 09-02 approving a General Plan Amendment and Zone Change for the Adobe Springs project, thereby bringing closure to a three-year planning effort by property owner and developer Carey Martz and engineer Eric Goldsmith. The zone change for the 35-acre residential project on the east side of south Adobe Road north of Mesa involved unifying the property's zoning by changing a five-acre section of the property from rural living to single-family residential.

The Adobe Springs plan contains 79 housing units in a gated community, with access gates to a neighboring future commercial area, and will feature a centralized community recreation area connected by walkways. Pedestrian connectivity, porches and paseos were all part of the proposed development, which aims to reduce vehicle traffic and encourage a walkable neighborhood. "We are trying to promote smart growth and livable communities," said the developer. The project's planned six-foot walls would consist of 4-ft. block with 2-ft. decorative wrought iron rods on the top portion to allow views, and the developer agreed to construct a six-foot solid block wall on the west side, facing his future commercial development on the adjacent site, to meet the City Development Code requirements.

Regarding the Planning Commissioner appointments, Council received recommendations presented by the task force of Mayor Pro Tem Flock and Councilman Cole, who had reviewed applications and conducted interviews of the candidates. Council then reappointed Bill Easter, who has served on the Planning Commission since 2005, to another term and appointed Carey Alderson to fill the seat formerly held by Irving Stone.

Responding to several public comments regarding the upcoming General Plan update by planning firm Hogle-Ireland Inc. and the Council's decision at its Jan. 13 meeting to exclude an optional \$42,300 expenditure to form a citizen's General Plan Advisory Committee, the City Council agreed to revisit the item at its next council meeting and would consider reinstating the option to ensure public input into the development issues being addressed by the General Plan.

Also carried forward to a future meeting was the issue of unsolicited materials being distributed in Twentynine Palms that are causing a litter problem, such as the mass distribution of unsolicited phone books. The Council instructed City Staff to study options, address any practical problems, and prepare a draft ordinance that might require distributors to obtain a permit from the City to distribute materials and to pick up any unclaimed materials in a timely manner.

For more information on any of these issues, contact City Hall at (760)367-6799.

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