



CARMEL VALLEY DEADBEAT DEVELOPER WANTS TO STIFF HABITAT PLAN

Lee Klausen is the weed whacker of Carmel Valley. Over the past decade, the chair of the Carmel Valley's landscape oversight committee has doggedly pursued the bandits who reaped profits from developing half of Carmel Valley and left the community on the hook for over a million dollars worth of park and landscaping improvements.

And, as it turns out, some of those same people will try in the next several weeks to convince the County Board of Supervisors to let them run out on a promise to contribute their fair share to the County's habitat park and preserve system in their Otay Mesa master planned development.

Before the Supervisors make a decision, they should listen to Lee Klausen about Carmel Valley's MAD (Maintenance Assessment District) experience.

A month ago, Klausen and his volunteer committee who oversee Carmel Valley's landscaping fund found themselves within reach of their quest to eliminate the weed infested scraps of common land that plague the community. Some of them are slopes, others medians, and one is an unfinished linear park—mostly owned and abandoned by the Baldwin Company after it declared bankruptcy in the mid-1990's.

After years of paralysis because of clouded ownerships that stymied five different City Attorneys, two successive Council Members and several very competent city staffers who manage the landscape fund, Carmel Valley may soon see many of these eyesores bloom into gardens.

For Klausen, the victory is bittersweet. As he just discovered, several years ago the city, unbeknownst to almost everyone, had taken possession of several of these Baldwin properties, including some with inadequate and broken irrigation systems, when the developer turned over the roads to the public. The city had no choice: either let the land continue to degrade, or step in and fix it.

The good news is that Carmel Valley's landscape fund is well managed and now that the city is in control of these former Baldwin properties, a lot of awful looking areas will soon disappear. The bad news is that city taxpayers are stuck with a bill estimated at \$15,000 for improvements that were the responsibility of the former developer.

But, more significantly, the company also ran out on their obligation to bring half of a ten-acre linear park under the SDGE power lines up to a standard that would allow the city to take ownership.

At current costs for developing parks, that means a million dollars or more in grading, irrigation and environmental mitigation is necessary before the area can qualify for park development funds.

Village Properties, one of the Baldwin-Lite entities that emerged from the bankruptcy proceedings and still operates in Carmel Valley and Otay Mesa, now owns the power line parkland property.

So far, they have not presented plans to upgrade their part of the park and likely it will continue to serve as the community doggy restroom as it has for twenty years if their behavior in Otay Mesa is any indication.

Environmentalists are very worried that the County Board of Supervisors might set a dangerous precedent in the next few weeks by letting the same Baldwin-Lite crew out of their agreement to purchase 1250 acres of pristine habitat within their Otay Ranch development.

The purchase would make up an important part of the County's habitat preserve system because it is a key wildlife corridor. And they are required to make it because that is what they promised to do when they were given permission to develop the 23,000-acre master planned community.

Their plan would be a body blow to San Diego's nationally recognized Multiple Species Habitat Plan, a landmark agreement between developers and environmentalists achieved after years of battles and compromises. Breaking the deal poses a serious threat to San Diego's efforts to fulfill its housing needs in a timely fashion while preserving important open space.

Environmental groups are concerned for very good reasons. The future of the habitat preserve program depends on a high degree of certainty for both sides—developers know where they can build and environmentalists can count on a well-defined viable habitat system.

Letting any developer avoid contributing their fair share contribution to San Diego's open space system sets a dangerous precedent, and in this case, it would let folks with a history of avoiding public obligations draw a blueprint for others who might want to do the same thing.

Fortunately, most developers have not backed out on their responsibilities in Carmel Valley and to the countywide habitat preserve. As a result, the County is well on its way to achieving an integrated habitat system, and Carmel Valley is arguably the best looking community in San Diego.

Weed-warrior Lee Klausen is good and mad about the price tag on the mess the miscreant Baldwin Company left behind in Carmel Valley. The County would do well to listen to Lee's story before they let these guys get away with another broken promise.