



## MY BEST SHOT

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### BIG OIL BIG GUN IN SORRENTO HILLS

If you think Big Oil is a Big Deal in the Presidential campaign, check out the battle raging between Chevron and Sorrento Hills homeowners over a proposed regional service station for their neighborhood. And, despite another candy-wrapped presentation by Chevron public relations flaks at a recent Sorrento Hills Planning Board meeting, few attendees were convinced that a full service gas station belongs in their residential neighborhood.

Chevron Corporation is determined to build a regional service station, which means a “jiffy lube,” convenience store, car wash, and a 24 hour gas station, under the noses and eyes of hundreds of new homeowners in Sorrento Hills. The neighbors, who pleaded their case at the overflow Planning Board meeting, were shell-shocked as Chevron representatives described a bare-bones landscaping plan and architectural ideas from the school of nouveau-ugly. From all indications, Chevron is going to build and operate the full service station their way and the neighbors can take the highway.

And, a highway is what Chevron needs to make money at this venture, which suggests that the accompanying shopping center won’t look anything like what residents thought was described in their community plan—a neighborhood-oriented center—but another unimaginative regional shopping center where people from here, there and everywhere gas-up, grocery shop and go.

Instead of sipping morning fresh coffee with neighbors on a coffee house patio, Sorrento Hills residents will be joining thousands of daily commuters filling-up their thermoses with bad coffee, their fuel tanks with price-gouging gas, and their stomachs with stale hotdogs.

Chevron representatives did their best to assure residents that they needn’t worry about noise, bright lights, transients and visual blight in the midst of their residential community

. A read of the environmental report, required for city approval, tells the tale. The document, written by Chevron consultants, says that the full service

station won’t have any negative community character, pollution and noise impacts, which speaks volumes about their intention to not worry about such things, either.

The neighbors disagree, and history is on their side.

When the owner of the Shell station overlooking SR56 came before the Carmel Valley Community Planning Board several years ago, he promised that the lighting would respect the neighborhood and the habitat preserve across the freeway. He promised he would adhere to Carmel Valley sign ordinances to the spirit and letter of the rules. And, he promised to contribute to the community.

Today, the Shell station sports blinding lights for traffic heading east on SR56 and is regularly decked out like the Ringling Brothers Circus in banners and flapping primary colored plastic, a warning for Sorrento Hills that there is no way to enforce aesthetics, and that lighting standards are useless. And, once a service station becomes a regional draw, there’s no reason to care about community concerns, as anyone who has complained about the lighting at Shell knows.

Ask the Rancho Penasquitos Planning Board about promises made to them when they worried about traffic patterns and lighting generated by a new gas station across from the Doubletree Inn, which is now an eyesore lit like the mother ship. And, when it comes to modern gas station architecture, the Carmel Valley Arco station’s minimalist landscaping adorning the innovative Mission-Florentine building doesn’t inspire a lot of confidence, either.

Ironically, Chevron’s mission statement includes the following: “Since the success of our company relies upon the goodwill and cooperation of our neighbors, we in turn have an obligation to share our resources, experience and time to benefit the communities in which we live and work. The company is acutely aware that we cannot thrive if our neighbors are