

Mistrust, Numbers that Don't Add Up, and Weird Connections Frustrate La Costa Valley Homeowners

On April 26, 2007, more than one hundred La Costa Valley homeowners gathered at Coastline Community Church to discuss why a new middle school, within walking distance of their La Costa Valley homes, was never built. The homeowners believe that they were lied to and emphasized that the promised school had been a significant consideration for which they were willing to pay a premium when they bought their homes. The well organized and orchestrated meeting revealed an extensive list of cover-ups and questionable actions on the part of the San Dieguito Unified School District. The meeting, led by La Costa Valley homeowner Leonard Steinberg, covered three points: "What we believe; What we have discovered; and What can we do."

Last year, some curious La Costa Valley residents began making inquiries into the removal of a sign that had been posted for about six years on the 28 acre property where the new school was to have been built. They approached the School Board, but officials had no response, except that they didn't know who put up the sign or who took it down. Soon after that inquiry, a large map in the lobby of the School Board District, which had once displayed the words "Future Middle School," was altered to show no sign of a school; at the same time, the words "Future Middle School" on the District's website disappeared.

At that time, the La Costa Valley Homeowners Association invited the District to explain what was going on. Many residents expressed their frustration and concern about never having been informed by the School District that plans for a new middle school had been scuttled. They were upset about the sudden disappearance of the posted sign and the alterations to the District's website and lobby map. They said they had bought their homes in this planned community with the understanding that they would be getting a middle school, and that they have been paying a special \$800 a year assessment to help pay for it. Furthermore, they declared that they will be paying the assessment for the next twenty-five or so years.

Steve Ma, Superintendent of Business for the School District, and two board members, along with their attorney, attended

the meeting. Ma made an extensive presentation, including hand-outs, explaining how enrollment throughout the district has flattened since the \$5.8 million middle school land purchase in 1999. He explained that under these circumstances, it would be "fiscally irresponsible" to build a new middle school in La Costa Valley, especially since enrollment was down at the two other middle schools in the area. La Costa Valley residents were upset and confused. They asked why the School Board had brought an attorney, and why the two school board members present declined to address the direct questions La Costa Valley residents posed.

Toward the end of that meeting, Steinberg asked the board members about a meeting the Board had had in the recent past with the City of Carlsbad concerning the possibility of rezoning the middle school property. At that moment, one board member stood up and exclaimed, "That was not true. No such meeting ever took place!" Then, to everyone's surprise, from the back of the room, Carlsbad City Council Member, Mark Packard, stood up and said, "Yes, that meeting did take place, and I was there!" The crowd was stunned. After accusations and denials, the meeting suddenly ended.

According to Steinberg, the figures Ma presented at the meeting, of how many children live in

La Costa Valley, are off by 300 percent, and there are still too many questions unanswered. For example: Why was a bridge built across Calle Barcelona if it wasn't certain that a school

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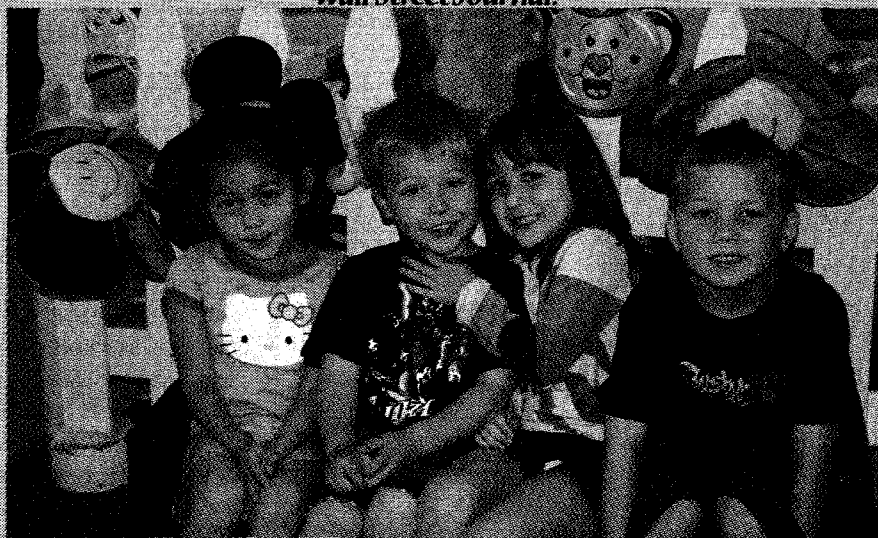
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would be built there? Why weren't residents informed years ago about the possibility that a middle school wasn't going to be built? Why was the sign for the Middle School visibly posted for so many years? Why did the School Board bring an attorney to the meeting? Why has it been so difficult to receive public records from the School Board? Why did that School Board Member deny having met with the City of Carlsbad?

When asked why they were now holding a meeting at Coastline Community Church and not their own Homeowners Association, someone responded by saying the La Costa Valley HOA was not helping in the school matter because the middle school lot was not on La Costa Valley HOA property. Many of the homeowners, however, remain upset with their HOA Board's inaction. To make matters even more intriguing, Steinberg and other residents see another weird connection. They found that a 2004 San Dieguito High School Board Member named Joseph L. Stine, has the same name and spelling, and bears a striking resemblance to their own HOA Board Member and past President, Joseph L. Stine. We contacted Stine to verify this. Stein replied by saying, "I was on the San Dieguito High School District for a two year term. That term ended in December of '04.

This issue was not an issue at the time that I was on there."

Steinberg also pointed out, "The rights for State funding for the property have now expired," and if the School Board had any chance of building a middle school in La Costa Valley, the whole process would have to begin again and take years; it is now unlikely that a middle school will ever be built.

So, now that a new middle school is highly unlikely, what are the goals of the La Costa Valley homeowners? They still want to meet with the School District, and hope the District will work with them and be fiscally responsible. They want to make sure the property will benefit La Costa Valley residents and the public. The choices the residents now have are clear. 1) Walk away. 2) Get the La Costa Valley HOA to fight for their community. 3) Continue to facilitate solutions with the School District on their own behalf. 4) Pursue legal action.