

## Valley Center Community Planning Group

**Approved Minutes** for a regular meeting held on **March 11, 2024** at 7:00 p.m. in the Valley Center Community Hall, 28246 Lilac Road, Valley Center, California 92082.

Delores Chavez Harmes, **Chair** | Dori Rattray, **Vice-Chair**; James Garritson, **Secretary**

**A**=Absent; **Ab**=Abstention; **DRB**=Valley Center Design Review Board; **N**=Nay; **P**=Present; **R**=Recused; **VCCPG**=Valley Center Community Planning Group; **VCPRD**=Valley Center Parks & Recreation District; **Y**=Yea

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### A. Roll Call

- Zoom Link:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87150717984?pwd=UGR3NjIzbHpYNU1WTytVRk9Ec0hCUT09>
  - The Meeting was called to order at **7:00 p.m.** and a Quorum was established with **13 members present**. Mr. Ciupitu attended the meeting via Zoom and arrived after the Roll Call.
- |                                  |                              |                                       |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ● Lisa Adams - <b>P</b>          | ● Susan Fajardo - <b>P</b>   | ● Matt Matthews - <b>P</b>            |
| ● Chris Barber - <b>P</b>        | ● Michael Farrier - <b>P</b> | ● LaVonne Norwood - <b>P</b>          |
| ● Michelle Bothof - <b>P</b>     | ● Julia Feliciano - <b>P</b> | ● Dori Rattray - <b>P</b>             |
| ● Delores ChavezHarmes- <b>P</b> | ● James Garritson - <b>P</b> | ● <del>Larry Schmidt</del> - <b>A</b> |
| ● Vlad Ciupitu - <b>P*</b>       | ● Steve Hutchison - <b>P</b> | ● Kevin Smith - <b>P</b>              |

### B. Pledge of Allegiance - Chair Harmes

### C. Approval of February 12, 2024 Minutes

- Vote was postponed until the April 8, 2024 meeting.

### D. Public Comments: Members of the public may address the Planning Group on any topic not on the agenda.

- Eugene Apicella decided to wait until next month to share about short-term rentals in Valley Center.
- Kevin Smith shared that he was happy how the Valley Center Planning Group members acted at the meeting last month.

### 1. Terra-Gen-Amy Roth, Chief Environment Health & Safety Officer

- Mark Turner made a presentation about Terra-Gen, which owns and operates the battery storage business in Valley Center. He shared that California is implementing a plan to reach a zero carbon future. The Valley Center Energy Storage Project provides services that are important to the local grid.
- Mark Slovick is a representative for the County. Fire Marshall Davidson and Chief Napier were also introduced by Chair Harmes.
- Mark Turner shared information about how Terra-Gen follows the advanced California Fire Code and other layers of safety. These include Modules, Enclosures, Site location, and Planning and Training. Terra-Gen

- Paul Way, a fire engineer, representing Terra-Gen, shared information about the BESS Components. Each battery module is arranged in a rack. Each enclosure has its own fire suppression system. The September 2023 fire affected a limited number of modules within a single enclosure.
- The Fire Department did not need to engage the fire or assist with suppression. The April 2022 alarm was not a fire. The water system release only affected modules in a single enclosure. The Fire Department considered this event a false alarm.
- The Hazards Analysis and Fire Protection Plan recommends 51ft as the safe distance from hazards and smoke associated with an enclosure fire. No neighbors are located within that area. BESS enclosures have their own thermal management systems.
- All neighboring fire agencies are trained annually by Terra-Gen in how to engage a potential fire.
- **Chair Harmes shared her concerns that Terra-Gen misrepresented their communications with us and was not truthful in their communication with us and Supervisor Desmonds office. If they are deceitful in small things, they will be deceitful in larger things.**
- Dr. Matthews shared his concerns about the fumes that people were exposed to during the Terra-Gen fire. Mark Turner shared that the fumes produced are not toxic. There was discussion about types of chemicals in use in creating battery storage.
- Fire Marshall Davidson and Chief Napier shared information about how the fire district delivers fire evacuation notices.
- Ms. Norwood asked if Terra-Gen learned anything from this event and how to move safely forward. Ms. Rattray asked a question about how many storage facilities are operated by Terra-Gen. There are four plants in California. This is the second facility that was opened by Terra-Gen.
- Mark Turner shared that it is essential for battery storage projects, as it helps provide reliable energy. He does not believe that the recent fire posed any risk to the community. This project benefits Valley Center because it provides energy for the local power grid.
- Fire Marshall Davidson shared that anyone who has solar panels on their home is currently using the Terra-Gen storage facility. Ms. Rattray shared concerns about the possible long-term damage that this facility can have towards humans, animals, and water.
- Chief Napier shared that no lithium was on fire. There were plastics that did burn. Water and air samples were taken during this fire. There were no detectable hazards in the water and the air.
- The water from the suppression system never left the property. From a fire department perspective, the air quality was no different than a car fire or someone illegally burning trash in the community. There were no exotic metals that burned in this fire.
- Mr. Garritson asked a question about what happened to the enclosure. It remains on the property. Ms. Bothof asked how Terra-Gen disposes of the lithium-ion batteries. The expected lifespan of this project is 15 years.

- Fallbrook is a public utility and SDG&E is a state-sponsored monopoly. The County does not have the authority to review SDG&E permits.
- Chief Napier explained how the fire district operates. Marshall Davidson does not believe that the Terra-Gen facility poses any danger to the community. All modules are completely enclosed. The Valley Center Fire Protection District works closely with Terra-Gen.
- Fire Marshall Davidson shared that there were some 200 lb. batteries stolen from Terra-Gen that were damaged by water.

**E. Action items (VCCPG advisory vote may be taken on the following items)**

**1. Bike & Pedestrian Crossings: (Norwood) - Bike lanes on both sides of Old Castle Road between Costalota Rd. & Cedar Trail Rd. connecting to existing bike facilities. Traffic safety improvement by replacing or upgrading the existing pedestrian countdown signal heads and push button crosswalks on Cole Grade Rd., Pauma Heights Rd., Cole Grade Rd., and Valley Center School Rd. (VIRTUAL VOTE) [APPENDIX]**

- **Motion: Move to approve the bike and pedestrian crossings on both sides of Old Castle Road between Costalota Road & Cedar Trail Road & upgrading the existing pedestrian countdown signal heads and push button crosswalks on Cole Grade Road & Pauma Heights Road & Cole Grade Road and Valley Center School Road.**
- **Maker/Second:** Harmes/Feliciano
- **Motion Carries 12-0-0 (Y-N-Ab)**
- Lisa Adams - Y
- Chris Barber - Y
- Michelle Bothof - Y
- Delores ChavezHarmes-Y
- Vlad Ciupitu - Y
- Susan Fajardo -
- Michael Farrier - Y
- Julia Feliciano - Y
- James Garritson - Y
- Steve Hutchison -
- Matt Matthews - Y
- LaVonne Norwood - Y
- Dori Rattray - Y
- Larry Schmidt -
- Kevin Smith - Y
- Ms. Norwood shared that the Planning Group did not receive a copy of the Bike and Pedestrian Crossing plans. She shared concerns that the community had about the installation of video cameras.
- Ms. Norwood was very concerned about the County Planner not getting back to her regarding multiple questions regarding this project. She left three phone messages and two emails and never received a reply. There was no traffic plan submitted to the Chair about this project. The plan that was sent to the Chair had contradicting statements. It also does not mention bicycle lanes or anything to do with bicycles.
- Ms. Adams shared that these traffic signals will be modernized. Existing countdown signal heads and push button crosswalks will be upgraded or replaced.
- Mr. Smith asked how the video cameras would be used at these bike and pedestrian crossing signal poles.

- Chair Harmes suggested for Ms. Norwood to share comments and concerns at the BOS Meeting. The board did not take a vote on this item during the meeting. An electronic vote was taken after speaking to the planner and her supervisor on March 12, 2024.
- After the meeting, the County Planner did provide further information and clarified details about this project.

## **2. MacTan & Valley Center Roads Illegal Events: Barber (Informational)**

Chair Harmes shared that Mr. Barber was asked to review noise complaints along Mac Tan Road. Mr. Barber shared that the first course of action is to notify the San Diego Sheriff's Department. If the person contacting the dispatcher tells the dispatcher they are willing to sign, the dispatcher will make the call more of a priority. The caller should also try to provide the address of the property involved. The identity of the caller will remain anonymous. It is important to document and record the time of any incident. Contact the Sheriff's Department every occurrence. The person making the complaint should also contact the County and file a noise complaint if the noise continues more than once. Code compliance can come out Monday through Friday during regular business hours.

## **3. Aziz MPA PDS2023-MPA-23-014 APN 189-094-21-01: Hutchison – 27251 Valley Center Rd commercial store (7,250sf) with alcohol sales, car wash, gas station, quick service drive-thru restaurant. Open 24/7. Zone general commercial (C36).**

- Mr. Hutchison shared that there is a Measured Pre-Application for this project. Amir Aziz attended the meeting via Zoom. This pre-application process will take over a year before we will receive further information about this project. Mr. Smith encouraged the applicant to share site plans with the DRB prior to going forward with this project.

## **4. Cole Grade Road Pole Replacement P117598: (Harmes) Contractors are requesting night closure for Cole Grade Rd. to complete a pole replacement at 31459 Cole Grade Rd. Single lane closure starting 6pm, Friday April 5 – 6am, April 6, 2024. Full road closure between 6:30-9pm Friday, April 5th for crane operation.**

- Chair Harmes shared that there will be a road closure on these dates. This location is near Valley Center High School.

## **5. Noise Variance PDS2023-VAR-24-003: (Feliciano) Discretionary permit for a project on Lake Wohlford Rd., between Augustine Orosco Ln. and Armstrong Ranch Rd.**

- Ms. Feliciano shared that the County approved this noise variance and the project started at the end of February. The equipment used will attempt to muffle the noise made near this undergrounding project.

## **6. Subcommittee Roster: Harmes - Subcommittee members were nominated and voted on at the January 8th, 2024 meeting. A vote from the group does not need to be confirmed via approved minutes before it's effective. (Informational)**

- Chair Harmes shared information that all meetings held by planning group members are public.

## **F. Subcommittee Reports:**

### **1) Emergency Evacuation (Harmes):**

- Chair Harmes provided an update about planning for an emergency evacuation.

### **2) Cannabis Subcommittee (Mathews):**

- Dr. Mathews shared that less than 10% of the community were against cannabis ordinances and 60% were for it. The environmental impact report is pending.

### **3) Parks & Rec/Trails (Norwood):**

- The sheriff's department search and rescue has used the pond at Butterfield Trails Ranch Pond for training. Ms. Norwood shared information about the new starting blocks at Adams Park pool. Star Valley is owned by CSA and Butterfield is owned by the County. They have two different funding sources. The CSA does not have the funding to build or maintain an Intergenerational Center at Star Valley Park.

### **4) CPU (Ciupitu):**

- The next meeting is on March 28.

### **5) Mobility (Adams):**

- A brief update was shared about funding.

### **6) Revitalization Subcommittee (Ratray):**

- Ms. Ratray shared information about the problems with trash along the road. She has contacted the city of Escondido about the growing number of potholes at the bottom of Valley Center Road. Dr. Mathews shared that there are over 20 commercial signs along Valley Center Road. Ms. Ratray asked members to submit the locations and names of these commercial signs to her.

## **Related Reports**

### **1) Design Review Board (Smith/Adams):**

- Ms. Adams shared that Arco is trying to install a sign that is taller than 8 feet.

### **2) Tribal Liaison (Harmes):**

- Chair Harmes shared that the tribes will do all they can to help with new evacuation routes.

### **3) Association of Planning Groups (Hutchison):**

- Mr. Hutchison provided information about the committees. He is encouraging Valley Center to actively participate on all committees.

### **4) Website (Garritson):**

- Mr. Garritson will contact the County about fixing the website link.

### **5) Nominations & Board (Fajardo/Bothof):**

- Fire guidelines were last developed in 2010. There was discussion about the application process now that it is online. The Chairs are asking the County to consider using the old system.

### **6) Chamber/VCBA (Fajardo):**

- There are no openings.

**G. Adjournment**

- Next regular meeting of VCCPG: **April 8, 2024 at 7 p.m.**
- **The meeting adjourned at 9:17 p.m.**
- **Minutes were approved on May 13, 2024.**

**James Garritson, Secretary**

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**Appendix VCCPG March 11, 2024 Minutes**

I was contacted early this morning by Stefania Castillo, the county project manager who sent us information at the end of January related to item #1 Bike & Pedestrian Crossings under Action Items on our March 11, 2024 agenda. She apologized for not responding to the multiple attempts of LaVonne Norwood to gain insight and clarification on this project. Murali Pasumarthi, from DPW Transportation Division, whom you all may remember spoke to us at last month's meeting also called and apologized for the lack of communication. The new junior planners and student planners are still in training and have not mastered all the important intricacies of communicating with planning groups and the public.

Mr. Pasumarthi provided a detailed explanation of the project. He is respectfully asking for the VCCPG to reconsider our decision last night and take action to approve this project. His reasons are outlined below. After my conversation with Mr. Pasumarthi and having reviewed the project with the sound explanation provided, I see no reason for LaVonne to address this in a negative way with the BOS tomorrow. LaVonne and I have discussed this and she is in agreement. For this reason, I am taking the rare action of an electronic vote to approve Item #1 Bike & Pedestrian Crossings so it can move forward at the BOS meeting tomorrow.

If you have additional questions, please reply to all so Mr. Pasumarthi and the board is aware of the question and the answer.

I would need a second to the motion and your electronic vote yay or nay by the end of business today.

**Motion: Chair Harmes moves to approve the bike and pedestrian crossings on both sides of Old Castle Road between Costalota Road & Cedar Trail Road & upgrading the existing pedestrian countdown signal heads and push button crosswalks on Cole Grade Road & Pauma Heights Road & Cole Grade Road and Valley Center School Road.**

Delores Chavez Harmes - Chair

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Pasumarthi, Murali <Murali.Pasumarthi@sdcounty.ca.gov>  
Date: Tue, Mar 12, 2024 at 9:18 AM  
Subject: Valley Center - Pushbuttons and Ped Signal Heads  
To: dee.valleycenter@gmail.com <dee.valleycenter@gmail.com>  
Cc: Morgan, William <William.Morgan@sdcounty.ca.gov>, Hanger, Christopher <Christopher.Hanger@sdcounty.ca.gov>

Good morning, Delores:

Thank you very much for taking my call this morning regarding the proposed project to update pedestrian push buttons at two existing signalized intersections. Please accept our apologies for missing out opportunities to respond back in time to address the questions regarding the project and, for the confusion, the plans sent earlier may have created.

The specific scope of work is limited to replacing existing pedestrian signal heads with new count down pedestrian signal heads and to install new auditory pedestrian push buttons. These improvements are needed at the existing signalized intersections to comply with ADA. There are existing video detection cameras at the two intersections on Cole Grade Road at Pauma Heights Road and at Valley Center School. These cameras are limited to detecting vehicle presence and to send a signal to the electronics to change the traffic signals. They do not record or store any information.

We previously applied for and received a grant from the State to upgrade a select few existing traffic signals throughout the county including the two intersections in Valley Center with ADA compliant devices. We sincerely request your support to move forward with the proposed board action to seek authorization to advertise and award a construction contract. We are available to attend the next CPG meeting and happy to answer any additional questions the group may have.

Sincerely

Murali Pasumarthi, Traffic Engineering Manager  
Department of Public Works, Transportation Division  
County of San Diego Land Use and Environment Group  
C: 619-444-6910  
Email: murali.pasumarthi@sdcounty.ca.gov