

Monday October 6, 2025
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BORREGO SPRINGS COMMUNITY SPONSOR GROUP

APPROVED MINUTES

In-person at the Borrego Library, 2850 Country Club Rd, Borrego Springs & also via Zoom

THE PUBLIC IS ALWAYS WELCOME TO OUR MEETINGS.

WE REPRESENT YOU WHEN ADVISING THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ON LAND USE ISSUES.

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

John Peterson, Chairperson	Present
Jim Dax, Vice Chairperson	Present
Bruce Durbin	Absent
Rebecca Falk	Present
Bill Haneline	Present
Nancy McRae, Secretary	Present
Anne O'Connor	Present
Seat #5 - Vacant	
Seat #9 - Vacant	

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE MEETING of June 4, 2025 (Attached).

Motion to Approve	Bill Haneline
Second	Jim Dax
Discussion	None
Vote	Motion Approved Unanimously

C. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION (each speaker limited to 3 min): Opportunity for members of the public to speak to the Group on any subject matter within the Group's authority that is **not** on the posted agenda.

No public comments were made. Public Comment section closed.

D. ACTION ITEMS:

1. Discussion and recommendation for the "NOP" (Notice of Preparation) for the SEIR (Supplemental Environmental Impact Report) for the Rams Hill Project. Darin Neufeld, Project Manager, Department of Planning and Development Services (PDS), County of San Diego attending via audio feed. Please note that the discussion before the Sponsor Group is only regarding the scoping of the NOP, not on the merits of the project.

Darin Neufeld: NOP public virtual meeting was a couple weeks ago before BSCSG meeting. County agreed to allow BSCSG to make comments until 10/13. Looking for input on the project, ways we could consider designing the project, ways we could mitigate, alternatives to the project before we start the CEQA process.

MP (Member of the Public) Pam Wiedenkiller: Full-time resident. Read the following comments: “I am a full-time resident of Borrego Springs. I’m speaking about the NOP for the RH SPA (Specific Plan Amendment) and I’d like to make three points: 1. The NOP is incomplete. It provides almost no explanation of what’s being proposed for the **1,666 acres of dedicated open space** that RH wants to vacate. There are no maps, no resource descriptions, no identification of where the ‘replacement’ open space would be. Without that, meaningful public review under CEQA isn’t possible.

2) Board Policy I-103 being misused. That policy applies to **road and utility easements**, not to open space areas that were permanently protected under CEQA. The existing open space easement is legally perpetual under state law. Treating it as something that can be traded or moved isn’t just unlawful- it would set a dangerous precedent for all protected open space areas across the County.

3) **A Subsequent, not Supplemental, EIR is required. The County is relying on environmental studies from 1979 and 1986 that no longer reflect current conditions. RH’s own 2024 cultural survey found 89 archaeological sites, with 28 directly in the permanent open space area. This compares to just five that were identified in 1979. That new information alone should trigger a Subsequent EIR.** This project has changed too much, and the old information is too outdated.

I urge the County to: 1) withdraw the NOP and issue a revised version with the missing details; 2) Recognize the **I-103 cannot be used** to vacate perpetual open space; and prepare a **Subsequent EIR** that reflects today’s conditions and laws.

Finally I encourage **RH** to focus on the **1,308 acres already approved for development**. You’ve only built 264 homes, you have 236 vacant lots, and the ability to build over 1,000 more. Your plans for a **hotel, commercial and recreation areas, and a fire station** are opportunities to grow responsibly and strengthen what you already have. By pursuing a plan to vacate dedicated, permanent open space you put all the other elements of your SPA at risk of rejection.

If you remove the open space vacation, we can both win: **RH can prosper, and the vital buffer between your community and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park will remain protected - preserving the desert landscape that defines Borrego Springs.”**

MP Roberta Wall: Q - On the NOP the open space says 1,832 acres, but only 1,666 referenced by Pam Wiedenkiller - why is there a difference? A: Darin doesn’t know. A: David Garmon - the original SP (Specific Plan) referenced 1,666 acres. The SPA in 1986 increased acreage to cover 150 acres of archeological sites, 76 acres of biologically diverse sites.

MP David Garmon: Echoes request for Subsequent EIR. It took an EIR to approve the original 1500 acres, RH now talking about developing another 1600 acres - this is a major project. He then read the following comments: “I am speaking to you as President of the Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy, a Borrego-based non-profit formed in 2011 to preserve the scenic vistas, biodiversity, and desert habitat that is critical to our community’s health and economy.

I have reviewed the SP from 1980 that allowed the creation of RH, as well as the SPA of 1986. What is striking about these document is that the creation of RH was predicated on the creation of a **permanent conservation easement** that protects archeological sites, endangered

species, native plants, and view sheds. What is even more remarkable is that in the SPA the number of acres conserved was increased from approximately 1600 to more than 1800. Both documents make it abundantly clear that the destruction of 1500 acres for the creation of the residential development was only being allowed because of the permanent conservation of the half of the property that is adjacent to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

The current owners of RH were aware of the conservation restriction when they purchased the property. But now they want to vacate the easement in hope that multimillion dollar homes “built in the desert,” not on a residential street, will have greater appeal to home buyers. If the County of SD were to allow this conservation easement to be vacated, no similar agreement/pledge allowing development would be worth the paper it was written on.

The RH housing development as allowed under the 1986 SPA is not going away. The damage done to pristine desert habitat by the creation of the residential development is permanent. Shouldn't the mitigation that allowed the development also be permanent?

There are innumerable other problems associated with the RH proposal, but the fundamental issue is that if “permanent” doesn't mean “permanent” to the County of SD, the County can no longer be trusted to permanently stand up for the welfare and well-being of its residents.

My organization strongly supports the letters sent to you on this subject by the SD Wildlife Habitat Conservation Coalition, The Anza-Borrego Foundation, and the Sierra Club.”

MP Mr. Bacas: When you drive down Montezuma Grade and stop at one of the viewpoints purposefully built, you look out over a vista. When I was a child in the 70s, that was an unbroken field of view - like a painting. About 1/2 of it was destroyed by RH development. Small consolation was the open space easement. Given that you can see RH so easily from road, I hope the destruction of the view will be part of EIR. The view will be impacted by adding a bunch more roads where there are none presently. Hard to imagine how you could mitigate that by choosing parcels somewhere else.

MP Donna Atkins: 28 year resident, concerned that possibility that RH will be allowed to break a promise to our town. **The 1,600 acres of open space dedicated in perpetuity** are visible from throughout the valley. Changing that will change the appearance and character of our town forever. It will set a precedent that will open floodgates that will void every good faith agreement over the last 45 years due to an increased desire for profit. It's like someone decides they're not going to honor the prizes that have already been awarded.

MP Christina Seratino: Borrego resident, Someone who deeply values the stability of RH and promise of desert open spaces. Her concern is that the RH that was first approved in 1980's balance struck with County was clear - the tradeoff of **open space dedicated in perpetuity** gave the project its legitimacy. It was not a casual detail, it was a binding commitment. Today the request to vacate is much more than a zoning tweak. If approved, permanent open space is only permanent until its owners decide it's profitable to vacate. Consider the importance of desert plants and wildlife that surround it. These places are not interchangeable. California has mandated a 40% reduction in water use, and so the community has been making changes—farms fallow, golf

courses changing to drought tolerant grasses, so to now consider vacating open space is at odds with water restrictions. She urges protection of the original agreement.

MP Melissa Stevens: Has owned in RH for 25 years, in those years, the community has gone through 3 sets of ownership and numerous plans for expansion. Asked if economic impact is included in EIR because she has seen impact of failed expansion projects - they affect the whole community. Still lots of space already partially developed to accommodate what the owner is trying to do.

Darin - Under CEQA, we look at environmental impacts, not economic or social issues unless they result in a physical impact. Economic and social issues are very important for Planning Commission and BOS (Board of Supervisors).

MP Bonnie: Seconding what Melissa just said, owned in RH from 1995 to 2023. Every developer broke every promise ever made. Latest developer (RH) has saved us from a dead development and dead town, but we all chipped in a whole bunch of money every month to support these guys for 20 years. Despite their promise, the current owners (RH) closed the pool at the Casitas where I lived. I would not support any change in the open space because we can't support or believe any developer at RH.

MP Susan Gilliland: Has lived in Borrego 14 years. She is struggling with the basic concept that sacredness of open space easement is in peril. When she worked with the Sonoma land trust, "we worked with land owners that had a sincere wish to preserve and protect property in perpetuity. An easement granted in perpetuity meant in perpetuity." That easement stayed. I am puzzled by the lack of solidarity around this easement. How is it possible for BOS to overturn **an easement granted in perpetuity**. How do they even have something to talk about?

MP Lori Paul: Agrees with prior speaker - how can the county even require an EIR? That opens the possibility that any alternative can be selected to be implemented. There should not even be an EIR because **acreage is under permanent easement**. If it's not permanently protected then it abrogates all such agreements. Water restrictions, mesquite boscs are groundwater dependent. Anything outflow of water on the western canyons adds an unacceptable level of burden for our overdraft aquifer. Views hed issues are tremendous. This is an illegal taking of already protected land for ALL peoples. The County should legally deny request for another EIR.

MP: It's bizarre that we're even needing to have this meeting. The **(open space in perpetuity)** agreement is there. It cannot be changed, it shouldn't be changed, Why are we even having a conversation?

MP Michelle Collin: She is a 5th generation land owner in Tubb Canyon. Wants to voice her support of the letters sent and comments made in support of not touching the **open space dedicated in perpetuity**.

MP: Nancy McRae - Resident of Rams Hill. After clarifying with Darin that he is seeking alternatives to the SPA, she pointed in the direction of RH and said “there are hundreds of vacant lots up there, most with phenomenal desert views. That’s your alternative.”

She stated that in response to unsubstantiated comments Shannon Smith (RH) has made about the project’s merits, she researched the top 20 destination golf courses in the country plus five newer up and comers. Contrary to Shannon’s assertions, among her findings was that most of these golf courses do have homes on the golf course and are still building homes on the golf course. She addressed the project’s desire to be “desert centric” by pointing out that by plowing up the pristine desert in the **open space dedicated in perpetuity**, RH will be destroying the very environment it is trying to sell.

She agrees that 45 years ago when RH was first approved, it was to be a residential development and that never fully took off. But today, RH is missing it’s biggest market - short term rentals - which could fill the vacant lots currently existing. Every other public destination course researched relies heavily on AirBnB/short term rentals, which are proximate to the course and are often owned by owners who rent them out for the destination golfers rather than live in them.

Shannon has said that a “mixed use” (i.e. residential next to rental) won’t work in RH, but Nancy pointed out that she lives next to a RH Stay and Play house (a short term rental) and that short term rentals and mixed use are alive and well in RH.

Based on research, Nancy said the short term rental market, which only truly took off about 10 years ago, is already globally valued at \$130B, and is projected to reach over \$450B by 2035. Why would RH miss out on this growth? It fills their course with destination golfers, and fills the vacant lots with homes that will actually generate economic benefit for Borrego Springs - which the proposed multi-million homes will not. Those will likely only be used one week out of the year, and because high net worth owners typically do not rent out their homes short term, the homes will be empty 51 weeks of the year - delivering no economic benefit to Borrego.

She stated that she wants RH to thrive, that they have done tremendous good for Borrego Springs but that the proposed business plan is not the one they should be pursuing. Short term rentals are the future of the top destination golf courses and RH already has the infrastructure in place to build them.

MP Robert Shaley: Landowner in Tubb Canyon. Ground water research. Case closed, EIR shouldn’t be covering that 1600 acres.

MP: From Tubb Canyon - Asked if we remembered 2016 when guy named Rudy wanted to build 169 houses in the Ocotillo Forest? The community stood up to this plan, they gathered by the busload and went to county to protest. The ocotillo forest is important from many facets, and it’s important to children and future generations. The community must stand together. The County approved 16 units instead of 169. Look back at history.

Public Comments Closed.

BSCSG Comments Open.

John Petersen address BSCSG members: Should we send comment letter in terms of NOP? If we do, what are the topics we should address?

Jim Dax - We've all been saying the same thing. Definition of "permanent" needs to be recognized. We do want RH to be successful, there's no guarantee that they would succeed, so we'd start over with a lot of the same problems. If they reformulated plan without trying to take **open space that was dedicated in perpetuity** they would have no opposition.

Anne O'Conner - Sentiment from community is overwhelming. Laws are clear. New Supplemental EIR would be a can of worms that would just provide more loopholes. What is the process for a rejection?

John Peterson: Can't pass judgment on the project, just looking at it from environmental process. The letters from the SD Wildlife and Habitat Coalition and Sierra Club did a good job on procedure that deals with environmental review. County of SD looking for our input in terms of the process. Once we get through this the County issues its marching orders to RH. Process will take over a year, we won't hear from them until mid-2027. Very expensive. It's only one stop on the road that will take years.

Rebecca Falk: Difference between Subsequent and Supplemental EIR?

John Peterson: Parent document is the first document. Parent document dates to 1978 so it's almost 50 years old. A Supplemental EIR to a previous EIR is used for minor changes. It puts a band-aid on various issues. A Subsequent EIR is totally different and meant for taking a re-look at everything. It addresses major issues, not minor issues. The NOP has earmarked to do a Supplemental EIR which has generated significant controversy because clearly the proposed changes are not minor changes, they are major changes and require a different level of review. Plus the original EIR is almost 50 years old now. Much has changed in the environment in the last 50 years.

(Question from the Public) Can't the County just stop it right now? John: No.

(Question from the Public) By hearing EIR, are we giving up or conceding anything? John: No.

Darin - Both Supplemental and Subsequent have to answer the same questions under CEQA. Major revisions due to more severe impacts, change in circumstances, change in information. But both answer the same questions and require same amount of public review.

Rebecca Falk: Raised two issues in letter to Daniela. 1) Will EIR address water issue, or is there another way the county will address it? 2) Bio-mitigation means buying substitute land. There is no way RH can find "like" land. There is no possibility of equal value or equal kind. Park infill is not in any way like that **land bordering the park that was dedicated in perpetuity**.

She said that even though we have an agreement that allows for purchase of water credits to satisfy the amount of water RH wants to use, her concern is where is that water coming from? There are north, central, and south zones. RH has already overused south, it has arsenic so it is only used to water golf course. RH would have to pay for infrastructure changes, but that doesn't

address harm to aquifer. We haven't seen the results of studies that RH was supposed to undertake. She wants to make sure it is fully disclosed and we understand ramifications.

Bill Haneline: Too bad the county can't nip it in the bud having heard that it butting up against the park. Really sounds like it needs a subsequent, rather than supplemental.

John Peterson: We need a vibrant, healthy RH. He is concerned that application before us is the proverbial "shooting yourself in the foot." 10% of the project (vacation of **open space easement in perpetuity**) will cause 90% of the problems. Doesn't want to lose entire project over one part of the project.

He asked the group present to look out the south windows to a scar clearly visible in the ocotillo forest to the south. That scar has been there 10 years. That scar is less than 10 acres. The vacation is 1600 acres. That doesn't mean they're going to grade it all, but CEQA requires that it's analyzed as if they will. That particular issue is going to be a real problem.

There was agreement that the BSCSG should write a letter.

Motion by Jim Dax To send a letter to the County about all the issues discussed tonight: type of environmental document, vacation of **open space easement dedicated in perpetuity**, vista impacts, water impacts, alternatives to project readily available.

Second by Rebecca Falk

Discussion: Jim Dax will help with drafting the letter. Rebecca Falk said it may not be an option to outright deny a review of the **open space easement dedicated in perpetuity**, but the letter should convey there is **a lot** of sentiment that that should happen, i.e. why is the County even considering the option to vacate an open space easement that was dedicated in perpetuity?

Official public review period ends today. That period has not been extended, but the County has agreed to accept late comments from the BSCSG per Daniela.

VOTE: Bill Haneline Aye

Ann O'Connor Aye

Rebecca Falk Aye

John Peterson Aye

Jim Dax Aye

Nancy McRae Recused due to conflict of interest - owns property in RH

Unanimous approval of motion by the five members allowed to vote.

2. Report from Rebecca Falk regarding the enhancement of the transportation service for Borrego Springs as proposed by SANDAG.

Attending July SANDAG meeting about 2025 plan, reviewed briefly for info about BS which is 1) expansion of bus service to everyday and weekend on bus 891 and 892. 2) Micro-transit, 15 person vehicle by 2035. Once financing is found will study if by routes or demand, didn't think federal and state funding would be a problem. Public comments are closed. There's 10 years to go before they have to deliver.

3. Review of the 2025-26 Park Land Dedication Ordinance (PLDO) Priority List Letter

Rebecca Falk - we've seen this every year for quite some time. At one point we had a committee that came up with idea of splash pad at library for kids. We have re-affirmed the desire for that every year. A small splash pad would not use very much water. We were advised to keep submitting it as a request. They did try to get CINA (Capital Improvement Needs Assessment - County Capital Improvement Funds) funds, but didn't succeed. But they said to keep pushing it, we'll eventually get you some funds. Judy Haldeman (former BSCSG member) had public meeting at library and everyone liked the idea.

Motion by Rebecca Falk. BSCSG to respond to PLDO letter with the same language as prior year
Second Anne O'Connor

VOTE: Unanimous approved by the BSCSG six members able to vote.

4. Membership application/interview of Melissa Hudson for vacant Sponsor Group seat #5.

She has gone through qualification process from registrar of voters.

Q1 Connection and history with BS? Has lived here 2 years, Riviera farm house, 5-7 years ago she started coming to BS with her photojournalist husband. She left home near Seattle and loves this community - "can't feel any more blessed."

Q2 Education and Work Experience relevant to BSCSG? In 2008 working for developer in Seattle, so has background in permits, infrastructure, etc. She then went into coffee industry and did PR and marketing. Went to villages in Guatemala and other international destinations to see where the money they were giving farmers was being used. From this she learned how to go into community and listen and observe.

Q3 Why serve? Believes it's an important part of community to have a voice that is heard by the County. Wants to help community grow while maintaining charm.

Q4 Can you devote 8 hours/mo? Yes. Have time and dedication. Want to make an impact in BS

Q5 How would handle situation with disagreement? It's important to have a conversation with someone who has a different point of view. I see it as educational, not an argument.

Bill Haneline - Q: Do you work full time at RH? A: Yes Q: What if RH asked you about meeting? A: Nothing I could tell them they wouldn't already know. It's a public forum. I'm not on the planning side.

John Peterson: You're a member of Chamber of Commerce board and it would be good to have a board member on our group.

Bill Haneline: Q: What about recusal on RH issues? She has a job, but doesn't own land. John Peterson A: Yes, she would have to recuse herself. She has a financial interest.

Jim Dax: Would be happy to have you work with us. Diversity of background and skills, and you're still working rather than retired.

Motion by Jim Dax Extend invitation to have Melissa join the SG, Seat #5.

Second: Bill Haneline

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously approved by the six BSCSG able to vote.

Rebecca Falk: CIP Priority list Capital improvements did not get put on agenda. She caught it a few days before the deadline. She spoke with Revitalization group and said we would bring it back to the SG. Have had some comment letters. Need to get it added to agenda.

E. NON-ACTION ITEMS:

1. Update on Community volunteer award, presented by Anne O'Connor and Melissa Chad.
Will put this on the November agenda.

F: GROUP BUSINESS:

1. Notice of vacation of seat #9 by Bill Berkley.
2. Search for candidates for vacant seats.
3. Subcommittee Reports:
 - Report on the visual screening of the La Casa Del Zorro solar panels by Bill Haneline. Got in touch with Tony Sesena, GM. They didn't do much, now they will. They will get Ocotillo to plant out there. No discussion of rocks. Started out at the end of 2021 with that project. The former GM had it on her desk for a year. She's gone. They're open to it because we're pushing it. Falk: they promised it. It was hand in hand with our supporting it. McGrory promised to work with us. Dax: what is next step? Haneline: Told LCDZ to let us know when you're ordering ocotillo, where they will go and will there be rocks.
 - Meeting Updates: None
 - Correspondence received: Many items, see listed and attached to this agenda

G. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Bill Haneline

Second: Rebecca Falk

Approved: Unanimously approved by six members able to vote. Meeting adjourned at:

6:13

The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 5, 2025 at 4:30 at the Borrego Springs Library.
Potential items for this meeting:

1. Short-term rental impacts. Bill Everett presenting from Julian Planning Group
2. Borrego Springs Housing Survey. Dan Wright presenting for Wellsprings Community Fdtn.
3. Rodney Bruce RH will talk about Deep Wells housing
4. CIP

The Chair has appointed the following BSCSG Members to serve as points of contact for the following areas:

1. Road Maintenance, Bill Haneline

2. Dark Sky Ordinance and issues, Rebecca Falk
3. Association of Planning Groups, Jim Dax Attended last meeting, will attend next, 2 bills in state assembly would give unincorporated areas a vote, would give them representation, has not gone to a vote. A lot of talk about areas affected by wildfire, plans for how to deal with evacuations routes, transportation.
4. Landscaping at the La Casa del Zorro Solar Panel Field, Bill Haneline

Last minute comment Bill Haneline - horrible bump-outs are gone, 48 hours before the storm.

Emails sent to the Chair at petersonenv@hotmail.com will be forwarded to the appropriate person.

To sign up for County of San Diego email or text notices about various programs and topics that you can choose, visit: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASAND/subscriber/new?preferences=true#tab1> or search for the program at the county you want to find and scroll down to their email sign up link.

For further information and to be added to the Sponsor Group email list to receive agendas and agenda packets, contact the Chair at petersonenv@hotmail.com . Address U.S. mail to: Community Sponsor Group, P.O. Box 1371, Borrego Springs, CA 92004-1371. For agendas, minutes and Community Plan, visit: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/gpupdate/comm/borrego.html> .

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