

**From:** [JP Theberge](#)  
**To:** [COSD, Redistricting](#)  
**Cc:** [Scott Sutherland](#); [Melanie Fallon](#); [Jacqueline Arsivaud](#); [Eric Anderson](#); [Gregory Jay White](#); [Debbie O'Neill](#); [Jonathan Dummer](#)  
**Subject:** [External] Elfin Forest / Harmony Grove Town Council Letter  
**Date:** Saturday, December 11, 2021 5:56:18 AM  
**Attachments:** [Redistricting Letter - EFHG Town Council Letter3.pdf](#)  
**Importance:** High

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Hello Commissioners:

Attached is our letter concerning the united community of Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove and the wish to move forward with Map 13a v11 as it pertains to our community, as it preserves the continuity of the San Dieguito Planning Area and the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District (among other reasons), crucial entities to our community.

-JP



#### 2021 Board Members

JP Theberge, Chair  
Scott Sutherland, Vice-Chair  
Sheri Powers, Treasurer  
Debbie O'Neill, Secretary  
Eric Anderson  
Jacqueline Arsivaud-Benjamin  
Jon Dummer  
Melanie Fallon  
Gregory White

December 11, 2021

David Bame, Chair  
San Diego County Independent Redistricting Committee  
1600 Pacific Highway, Room 302  
San Diego, CA 92101

**RE: LET THE RESIDENTS CHOOSE THEIR OWN FATE, KEEP HARMONY GROVE AND ELFIN FOREST TOGETHER WITH SAN DIEGUITO PLANNING GROUP COMMUNITIES. DO NOT BE SWAYED BY COMMENTS FROM OUTSIDERS. KEEP US IN EXISTING DRAFT FINAL MAP (MAP 13a V11) AS IS**

Dear Commissioners,

My name is JP Theberge. I am the chair of the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Town Council and long-time resident of the community in question. The Town Council has done outreach via social media and in person to gauge the community's preferences. We would like to summarize the community's interests and concerns.

### Extensive support for Map 13a v11

Dozens of members of the Harmony Grove/Elfin Forest communities have already commented and most are in support of the Draft Final Map *as is* (map 13a v11), and we urge you not to adjust the map on the say so of outsiders to our community, particularly those with a long history of lobbying for special interests.

One commenter in particular, Ernie Cowan, has a decades long history of advocating for real estate industry interests as a representative of the Escondido Chamber of Commerce<sup>1</sup> as well as government affairs representative for a local realtor industry association<sup>2</sup>, and as Mayor of Escondido (30 years ago). He is not a resident of our community, and he does not speak for us. He speaks for outside business interests he has represented for decades as a politician and lobbyist. These business interests have worked for years to exploit our community for their profit at the expense of our safety, community character and wellbeing. His comment letter is replete with inaccuracies and mistruths that show how little he knows of our community.

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<sup>1</sup> Escondido Chamber of Commerce webpage, Ernie Cowan, [Economic Development Chair](#)

<sup>2</sup> [LinkedIn Page](#), Ernie Cowan VP of Government Affairs, North San Diego County Association of Realtors

## Historical separation from Escondido and San Marcos:

First, some history: In 2003, Harmony Grove residents petitioned LAFCO<sup>3</sup> to *not* be placed in the Escondido sphere of influence primarily to stave off annexation attempts and maintain autonomy and not be influenced by business groups such as those represented by Mr. Cowan. They chose to do this because they felt that the City of Escondido did not have best interests of the community at heart. Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest have both fought off annexation attempts together from Escondido and San Marcos<sup>4</sup> over the years and are no longer in either cities' spheres of influence. Our community is united in wanting to stay independent, rural and unincorporated.

## Keep us united with our San Dieguito and RSF Fire District Peer Communities

It is crucial we be kept in the same district as our San Dieguito Planning Area community peers and to not separate communities within our Fire District in order to allow us to better advocate for our community and our public safety. Fire safety and Land Use are the #1 and #2 concerns in our community and are the main issues the Board of Supervisors deal with.

## History of fire unites us

The entire valley is in a Very High Fire Severity Zone with one two lane road for evacuation. It has faced dozens of wildfires over the years including the Harmony Grove Fire<sup>5</sup> (which destroyed over a hundred homes in our communities and killed one person in Elfin Forest), the Del Dios Fire and recently the Coco's Fire (2014)<sup>6</sup> which destroyed upwards of 30 homes in Harmony Grove.

## History of collaborating on fire safety

We have been united *for decades* in supporting each other across the valley and fighting to protect our community from the existential threat of wildfires, including the founding of our first volunteer fire company, the Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Fire Department some fifty years ago manned by community members of Harmony Grove, Elfin Forest and Eden Valley. In the 1980s, both Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest residents voted in a fire benefit fee (the largest in the County) in order to fund that fire district. When it was time to upgrade to a non-volunteer-run station in 2014, together we successfully lobbied the County to allow us to merge with the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District<sup>7</sup>. Most recently, we have formed our Fire Safe Council, the Elfin Forest / Harmony Grove Fire Safe Council. We are in the same County Service Areas, CSA 107 and CSA 17.

## Public Services, more in common with each other and peer communities than San Marcos or Escondido

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<sup>3</sup> *San Diego Union Tribune*, [ESCONDIDO: City is slowly growing to full geographic size](#), "residents in Harmony Grove successfully persuaded county annexation officials to remove their rural enclave from the acreage officially designated as Escondido's sphere of influence, because property outside that area cannot be annexed into the city."

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, [Rural Areas Resist San Marcos' Web](#) "Other speakers called San Marcos "a hungry land wolf" whose "developer-driven" proposal would destroy the rural character of such surrounding areas as Elfin Forest, Harmony Grove..."

<sup>5</sup> *San Diego Union Tribune*, From the archives: [Harmony Grove fire raged across North County 25 years ago](#)

<sup>6</sup> *ABC News 10 San Diego*, [5 years after Cocos Fire, community in north San Diego County is slow to rebuild](#)

<sup>7</sup> *San Diego Union Tribune*: [Rancho Santa Fe Fire District submits application to reorganize with Elfin Forest/Harmon Grove](#)

Aside from our common rural residential nature, fire safety concerns and conservation ethos, Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest are intertwined in a number of other ways with regards to public services:

- **Fire District:** We are in the same fire district, the Rancho Santa Fe Fire District whose chief has already testified to the importance maintaining the rural communities united. The District stretches from Harmony Grove to Elfin Forest to Rancho Santa Fe.
- **Community Planning Area:** We are in the same community planning area, under the San Dieguito Planning Group.<sup>8</sup> The planning group includes Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove and Rancho Santa Fe residents among the board membership. Leaders of the planning group have testified that the community does not want to be split up and that a coastal district is acceptable.
- **County Sheriffs:** We are served by the same San Diego County Sheriff's substation (not Escondido or Encinitas PD).
- **Elfin Forest Harmony Grove Town Council:** We have one town council whose board consists of members of both Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest communities, with borders formally recognized by the County and inclusive of the entire Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove community.<sup>9</sup>
- **Community Plan:** The community plan (link [here](#)) for Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove is a unified document included as a formal, enforceable, part of the approved San Diego County General Plan.<sup>10</sup>
- **Community Foundation:** We have a 20+ year old Community Foundation which provides grants for the benefit of the entire community.
- **Fire Safe Council:** We have an active fire safe council that is composed of residents of rural Harmony Grove, Harmony Grove Village and Elfin Forest. Being united and sharing the same fire district are crucial to our safety.
- **Shared borders:** The borders of Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest are literally connected. And our town council and community plan borders are formally recognized by the County and included in the same county planning area, as stated above. *Any suggestions to the contrary are misleading and untrue attempts to undermine our community.*
- **Conservation and open space:** The community features thousands of acres of linked conserved land and open space and trails which were conserved, in part, by efforts of Harmony Grove and Elfin Forest residents who share the affinity for conservation and even founded and are board members of the Escondido Creek Conservancy<sup>11</sup> which has grown into a regional conservation powerhouse.
- **Shared events:** The Town Council's annual Fourth of July Parade and Picnic, a 45 year tradition, is organized and planned and has participation by members of the entire community of Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove. The annual Keepin' it Rural Trail Run fundraiser is organized and

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<sup>8</sup> County of San Diego, [San Dieguito Community Plan](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Elfin Forest / Harmony Grove Town Council website](#).

<sup>10</sup> County of San Diego, [The Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove portion of the San Dieguito Community Plan](#).

<sup>11</sup> Escondido Creek Conservancy [website](#).

attended by members of both communities.

- **Unincorporated County:** We are a mostly rural, unincorporated area surrounded by three different cities and we face issues that are separate and distinct from issues that concern these cities.

## A history of outside interests attempting to undermine the community

Outside special interests have attempted to split our community up many times over, whether via annexation, general plan amendments or redistricting. Every time, our community has banded together to push back on their attempts. Most recently, rural residents of Harmony Grove as well as those of Harmony Grove Village joined forces with Elfin Forest residents to sue the County over development issues that jeopardized the community's fire safety and community character (Elfin Forest Town Council vs. County of San Diego et al). Members of both communities fundraised for the lawsuits because our safety and survival depend on it. We prevailed and will continue to present a united front against forces that attempt to undermine our community.

## Petitioning our elected representatives

Being an unincorporated community without a City Council or mayor places more importance on our ability to effectively advocate for ourselves. We are extremely active as a community and work with county staff and the Board of Supervisors on an almost daily basis. Being able to petition one supervisor and not being split from our Community Planning Group is crucial to our survival as a community. It is what has kept us together as a community for many decades.

**Splitting us from our historical peer communities in the San Dieguito Planning Group and our peer communities in the Rancho Santa Fe Fire District will create logistical issues for us that will put us at great risk and destroy our community.**

## Extensive input from community

Our community spoke and commented dozens of times in previous hearings, and you listened. These commenters included members of the San Dieguito Planning Group, the Fire Safe Council, the Town Council, Escondido Creek Conservancy and the Harmony Grove Village HOA and included many members of Harmony Grove, Eden Valley and Elfin Forest communities.

We thank you for listening to our voices. Please continue to move forward with the proposed Final Draft Map (13a v11) as it pertains to our communities. Do not let outside interests change what our community truly wants.

With admiration and respect for the awesome task you have before you,

JP Theberge  
Chair, Elfin Forest / Harmony Grove Town Council

Attachments

Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove + Eden Valley boundaries

