

Minutes of the Palomar Mountain Planning Organization 2009 Annual Meeting

Saturday, May 23, 2009 at the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department

Board Members Present: Terri Bailey, Glenn Borland, Cecelia Borland (alternate), Robert Carlyle, Donna Dose, Elizabeth Getzoff (alternate), Bruce Graves, Rob Hawk, Susan Humason, Bob O'Neill, Bonnie Phelps, Michael Pique, Alan Serry, John Tainer, Earl Walls.

The annual general PMPO meeting was convened at the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department 11:00 A.M. Saturday May 23, 2009. In addition to the Board, about 55 members were present. The Chair, Glenn Borland, thanked the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department for hosting the Pancake Breakfast and Annual Meeting, Susan Humason for editing and producing the newsletter, Donna Dose and sister for organizing the breakfast, and Bruce Graves and Glen Secola for setup and cooking.

Secretary's Report (Michael Pique):

The minutes of the May 24, 2008, annual general meeting were distributed and approved with the addition of the full text of the Land Use survey questions.

Treasurer's Report (Alan Serry):

As reported in the PMPO spring 2009 annual newsletter, our balance carried forward from December 31, 2007, was \$41,931.19. Our 2008 expenses, totaling \$3,044.95, were \$678.32 for annual newsletter printing, \$246.00 for newsletter postage, \$440.76 for breakfast food and supplies, \$1,552.46 for emergency evacuation brochure printing, \$127.41 for general expenses and post office box rental. The total donations came to \$2735.00, we had \$365.50 receipts from the 2008 breakfast, \$150.00 revenue from newsletter advertising sales, and earned interest of \$386.12, giving us an ending balance (Dec 31, 2008) of \$42,552.86.

Traffic Safety:

Alan Serry says the water trucks are staying off the South Grade and fewer cattle are straying onto the East Grade; unsafe motorcyclists are the main problem. CHP understands we have a serious problem but Lieutenant Golonsky still says there's no money for enforcement on Palomar, and Sheriff Bishop says they defer to CHP on enforcement. The center rumble strips that were to be installed last year on the South Grade Road are not yet there; the hope now is for summer 2009. Guardrails keep vehicles on the road in an accident so our PMVFD volunteers don't have to go over the side at night; the Department of Public Works is maintaining them and replacing damaged ones. There has been some nighttime auto racing on the South Grade so be careful coming up or down there. Alan urged drivers to stay well clear of the center line, to avoid snow days, and to "drive as defensively as you can". Anyone with ideas, call Alan, (760) 742-0444.

Fire Safety and Tree Removal Program:

Jon Rollin, from the San Diego County Dead and Dying Tree Removal program, said they had a 50% permission response rate from Palomar landowners and have already marked 13,000 trees. Next steps are doing CEQA biological and archeological surveys, then cutting will begin around the end of July. Bonnie Burchill, also from the program, said they are still accepting Right of Entry forms, depending on location and the status of the contractor bidding process there. Phase 1 is the land north of Birch Hill and Pedley Valley. Phase 2 is Crestline, Conifer Road, and Bailey Meadows. Phase 3 will cover the East and South Grade roads. The county program will remove the dead trees only; Robert Carlyle said that residents needing brush clearing and chipping can get help from the Fire Safe Council and they should see him to sign up.

Ground Water Monitoring:

Rob Hawk said the PMPO is working with the La Jolla Indian Reservation on a pump test plan for their Cedar Creek commercial well project. The PMPO is asking for residents' permission to measure well water levels; please send permission forms and a sketch map to the PMPO. The goal is to have a 5-10 year record of levels to be able to evaluate any impacts from the pumping project. Mike Probert is measuring these wells periodically, and Linda Thorne said she has the data and can provide it.

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Community Emergency Response Team (CERT):

Bill Leininger, Palomar Mountain CERT Coordinator, said CERT helped coordinate the February Amgen bicycle race, is conducting ongoing classes including a 'pandemic flu' module, and has a new communications effort to get us linked into the County repeaters and ham radio networks, led by Dave Heiser.

County of San Diego Year 2020 General Plan Update:

Tom Burton recounted how work on '2020' began about 1997 and has progressed only slowly. The General Plan governs types of land use and housing density designations, which are then implemented by zoning laws consistent with the General Plan. During 2008, the PMPO had several community meetings discussing the plan and what our response should be to the County's request for comments. The county planners now expect to have the update finished in November 2010, only one month before the expiration of the overriding Forest Conservation Initiative (FCI). Tom said the county seems to want to wear down the community's will to resist; probably in the next month we'll have something from them to respond to.

Gordon Madison said that the PMPO's July 2008 letter to the county said that "60% of the people on the mountain favor commercial expansion" and that he has a copy of the map the PMPO sent with the letter. He said that Mr. Burton and the commercial interests on the mountain are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the community and are in a conflict of interest.

Earl Walls said the 60% was simple arithmetic. Question 4 of Jim Hamerly's survey asked, "For commercial land use right around the Summit (Palomar Store area): a) I would like to see no change (38% response); b) I would like to see a small and reasonable expansion of commercial use (48% response); c) I would like to see a larger commercial area, but still reasonable (13% response)." Earl said when you add 48% and 13%, you get about 60% in favor of some expansion.

Mike Pique said that during the 2008 Annual Meeting, it was announced that a June special meeting was likely to prepare a timely response, and the date, when set, would be posted in advance. Rob Hawk said the PMPO's recommendations are not binding on the county, the PMPO suggested the biggest reasonable commercial chunk for 2020. As public notice of the June 14, 2008, special board meeting, the PMPO put notices at the summit and through Bonnie Phelps' community email list. As to why minutes of that meeting were not published, Michael Pique said that we've traditionally only prepared formal minutes for the Annual meeting and the quarterly board meetings, not the special meetings. As PMPO secretary, he was concerned by Mr. Madison's charge that the board's decisions were not faithfully and accurately conveyed to the county.

Gordon Madison said he is circulating a petition of opposition to the letter and map that the PMPO submitted in July 2008.

Rob Hawk said that by inaction or delay, the Board would have ruled out any choice the community might have in the future. We, as the board, acted to say that some in the community want the idea considered by the county - the more future options we can give you, the community, the better.

Gordon Madison said it was a clear conflict of interest engineered by the Palomar Action Committee (PAC) of the PMPO. Earl Walls said he was a PAC member and 12 years on the PMPO board. The PMPO has tried to protect people who own land, or might in the future. The board studied the topography, tried to protect future owners - what the owners in 20 years might want to do on their property. Had the board not done this, "you'd lose all your options."

Bonnie Phelps said that when the 2020 committee received the 2020 draft map from the county, all the land-use designations were color-coded. Julian had a pink commercial spot, Warner Springs had a pink commercial spot, Ranchita had a pink commercial spot, but Palomar Mountain didn't have any pink at all.

Alan Serry said the issue goes beyond notification of the June 14 2008 meeting, that the May 3 2008 meeting at the Lodge had suggested a portion around the summit that some people thought should become rural commercial after the FCI. This wasn't the map submitted to the county after the June 14 meeting; that one had "20 something" parcels, not what the community expected to be sent.

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Bruce Graves explained that the map had to follow parcel boundaries, and that while the board did carefully consider the survey results and the Lodge meeting, the board members made up their minds and cast their votes according to their individual judgements.

Susan Humason said that at the June 14 2008 meeting, she was adamant that we really study the issues so we could properly address them. At that meeting, three possible maps were laid out and discussed, small, medium, and large. We took a long hard look at them, discussed the lands, and voted.

Glenn Borland said the board needs to be more formal and crisp, and promised to resolve accusations of conflicts of interest.

Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department (PMVFD):

Cliff Kellogg reported the PMVFD will become part of the county-wide fire department system in July. New people will be up on the mountain, who will help staff the PMVFD in emergencies. The Department also expects to be granted funds to purchase Barricade gel again this year, and will work with CERT on how to distribute it. The Walls buildings still need to be installed, money is the holdup. A donated 60-foot radio tower will be going up soon, though, and installation of a 1950's-era air raid siren. In order to install the tower and buildings, the PMVFD needs fast-track permitting approval from the county, and asks for the PMPO's blessing. The board approved this (Borland moved, Carlyle seconded, all in favor).

Community Safety Center (CCPM):

Earl Walls said a total of only 15 volunteers helped all year on the renovation and construction of the house next to the station, mostly the professionals on the mountain. He needs more volunteers to come help on Wednesdays and Saturdays or we will not make the September 1 deadline for receiving the final portion of the funding from the construction grant.

Forest Service Fuels Treatment:

Steve Wilson, U.S. Forest Service Battalion Chief, discussed "fuels treatments" as part of fire safety and fire exclusion. While Cal Fire has been working around the Palomar Observatory, brush-clearing mostly, the Forest Service has been working on Fry Creek in the State Park and on South Grade dead tree removal. The goal is better forest health through wider tree spacing and removal of fuels (downed trees) caused by insect kills. A more fire-resistant forest will reduce the intensity of a fire to where firefighters can attack it on the ground and apply retardant by air. Last year, they cleared about 200 acres and hand-crews cut up and pruned dead branches to 8 feet up. Linda Thorne asked about the Fry Creek area, whether the singed oaks will come back, and she said all the conifers were gone. Mr. Wilson said that the Fry Creek burn had been "hotter" than intended, but the next burn there will be cooler, and be pulled out further from underneath live trees. He said to go see the 6-mile marker on the East Grade Road for how it looks now, after the fuels reduction. Cliff Kellogg asked if the plan was to provide a buffer for fires coming up the east side of the mountain. Mr. Wilson said yes, at least when the fire reaches a forested area it will encounter a fairly clean forest floor.

Jerry Fisher asked if the approach is to burn the forests completely and frequently. Mr. Wilson said yes, that the forests do best with frequent low-intensity burns - not true for chaparral. Jerry Fisher disagreed, that natural fires were only one every hundred years or so at any particular location. Both referred to work by John Keiley in support of their position.

Eliminating Excess Burning on Palomar Mountain:

Michael Pique said the PMPO intends to work with Cal Fire and the Forest Service toward reducing or eliminating excess burning on Palomar Mountain. Toward this end, the PMPO wants a public investigation of the origin and early spread of the October 2007 Poomacha fire. The CDF published thorough "Red Sheet" reports within 9 months on the Rice, Witch, and Harris fires, but now, after 19 months, no report on the Poomacha fire has been made available. Even though a press release said that the fire was from an "undetermined single-source of ignition", our photographs suggest apparent additional sources. Part of the investigation should include the subsequent activities of out-of-town firing crews and their rationale for risking the Birch Hill and

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Crestline community by intentionally setting fire to private land and to one house on the East Grade road.

High Point Lookout Tower Restoration:

Brad Eells has been leading the restoration with spectacular results. The goal is to restore the tower to its 1964 appearance and maintain it with trained volunteers. For information, see www.socalfirelookouts.org

Comments on PMPO Board:

Suzie Kellogg thanked the board members for giving their time to do the research so we can talk about the issues facing the community. She thought their behavior was professional and that they work hard for us.

Neighborhood Watch:

Bonnie Phelps noted a sudden increase in break-ins: tools from the Mutual Water company and the community center, a computer from the school, items from the county road station and the Christian Conference Center. Most important - residents should get license plate numbers of any suspicious vehicles. "BJ" at the Sheriff's Department has provided brochures on how we might institute a community Neighborhood Watch program.

Bonnie also thanked "Planet Recyclers" for their free pickup today of appliances and electronics, normally a \$20 fee per item.

New Palomar Mountain History Books:

Susan Humason has new books available - a revision of "From Teepee to Telescope" and a whole new book, "From Field to Town".

Improving Community Communication:

Bonnie Phelps noted that over 600 people or families receive her 'Palomar Mountain News' free email broadcast. She suggests we find volunteers to print copies for people without email.

Timely Submission of PMPO Agenda Items:

Bob O'Neill said he had not been aware that the June 14, 2008, special PMPO meeting was going to make a decision on what to send to the county about the 2020 plan. He said it is difficult to give proper notice with meetings three months apart. He suggests that meetings topics fall into three categories: reports, information items, and action items. Action items should be listed and published on an agenda a week before, with this restriction possibly waivable by two-thirds vote or similar.

Election of PMPO Board Members:

The incumbents who are up for re-election are Rob Hawk, Bob O'Neill, Michael Pique, Alan Serry, and Earl Walls. Earl Walls has decided not to run again. Three persons present were nominated from the floor: Gordon Madison, Doug Lande, and Mike Chesney; each offered brief statements of their qualifications and viewpoints. Paper ballots were distributed, collected, and counted. Mike Chesney, Rob Hawk, Bob O'Neill, Michael Pique, and Alan Serry were elected to terms expiring in 2012.

The Board roster is:

(terms expiring May 2010):

Terri Bailey, Donna Dose, Bruce Graves, Susan Humason, and Scott Kardel.

(terms expiring May 2011):

Heather Beer, Glenn/Cecelia Borland, Robert Carlyle, Bonnie Phelps, and John Tainer/Elizabeth Getzoff

(terms expiring May 2012):

Mike Chesney, Rob Hawk, Bob O'Neill, Michael Pique, and Alan Serry

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 PM.

Michael E. Pique, Secretary.