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Coalition takes on boundaries

By: Raheem Hosseini, The Telegraph

Bob Hollis wasn't counting his chickens weeks before this week's election.

The El Dorado Hills city council candidate and Springfield Meadows Community Services District President was busy organizing the El Dorado Hills Community Coalition, a public interest group that has recently organized to tackle problems that a CSD or nascent city council might not have the scope or time to address.

Foremost on the coalition's agenda is the proposed redrawing of school boundaries in the El Dorado Union High School District, which could impact thousands of El Dorado Hills students, and a possible big box development in Town Center West.

Hollis said the idea for such a coalition evolved because of the limits of a CSD, which could not address the community's concern over noise impacts relating to flight paths at Mather Airport.

In fact, he started Communities for a Responsible Mather Airport, which has quickly become a tool of Folsom and El Dorado Hills area residents as they fight the proposed expansion of Mather's cargo capacity.

The controversial school district boundaries issue came to his attention when he was approached about fighting one of the proposed district plans, which would allow high school students living south of Highway 50 to remain at Oak Ridge High, while sending those north of Green Valley to distant rural-area schools, such as Ponderosa.

The alternative option would be to relocate those students south of Highway 50, while keeping those north of Green Valley at Oak Ridge.

But impacting one group of students to the benefit of another didn't sit well with Hollis, so he approached Andy Kopania, vice president of the Lake Forest Homeowners' Association, who was organizing his own effort, and suggested they team up "instead of fighting against each other."

The 10 coalition members, including a former school board member, have been busy working on an alternative plan, which they have taken to calling Plan X.

The plan, said Kopania, focuses on keeping the residents who already live in El Dorado Hills at nearby Oak Ridge, and instead "(shifts) the burden to new developments that haven't been completed yet."

It's an "alternative plan that will keep our community whole," said Hollis, adding that the coalition is "finalizing it right now."

Hollis hopes to meet with coalition members on Friday morning to put the finishing touches on a plan that will compete for attention among the four conceived by a district consultant and the other hybrid plans put together by interested parties.

The school district will meet Nov. 29 at Ponderosa High to hear the plan recommended by a district-formed committee.

"We think we have a way to do it," said Hollis. "Part of the problem is that growth in this area has outpaced the high school capacity, but not at a rate to build new high schools," which he said can cost around \$80 million.

Kopania is confident widespread community support, including more than 1,000 signatures and the backing of areas not affected by boundary changes, will prompt the district to carefully consider Plan X.

"We're really dealing with a group of parents who represent 2- to 3,000 students, and that's pretty powerful," he said.

The other big issue that Hollis said he "just learned ... has come back to life" is a possible big box store in the undeveloped portion of Town Center West.

After widespread community opposition, the Mansour Company lost a 4-1 Planning Commission decision in May to pass a finding of contingency, which would have allowed the developer to build a 120,000 square foot home improvement store without altering the already approved building plan.

After the hearing, Hollis said he received an apology from Tony Mansour, who promised "he wasn't going to 'shove anything down the throats of people in the community,'" Hollis quoted Mansour as saying.

But Hollis has recently heard rumblings the developer might be considering making changes to the development plan, which is a more cumbersome process than seeking a finding of contingency.

"It could become a heated battle," said Hollis, who added that big box development has been a major concern raised by residents at incorporation and candidate forums.

For more information about the coalition's involvement with the school boundaries issue, visit edhschools.org. For its involvement with the home improvement store development, visit smartercommunities.org.

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