



## City backs Tribe's application for trust

By JENNA CHANDLER

2010-07-22 08:18:42



In what appears to be another step toward strengthening ties with the Tule River Indian Tribe, the City of Porterville has thrown its weight behind the Tribe's application to put its land near the Porterville Airport into a federal trust.

Despite objections from concerned business owners who said they will be unfairly disadvantaged if the Tribe develops retail outlets on the 40 acres, the City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to send a letter to the U.S. Department of the Interior, which states: "the City of Porterville supports the Proposed Trust Conveyance of the Porterville Airpark on behalf of the Tule River Tribe."

Councilmen said they wanted to support the Tribe even though it has not shared any specific development plans, because the City is protected by a "cooperation agreement."

The letter, signed by Mayor Ron Irish, outlines the terms of the agreement forged in April. The City contends the agreement — which it called a "framework for collaboration" — will prevent development on the 40 acres within City limits without Council's approval.

"Certainly, wanting to know what the Tribe's intentions are is important, and that's why the agreement was established in a such a way that no matter what the development, whether it's a fun park or a roller skating rink or a gas station, they have to negotiate that with the City," City Manager John Lollis said.

The City opposed the Tribe's two previous applications.

"It's an arduous process we've gone through to get to this point," Tribal Administrator Sam Cohen said.

"What we've done here is really quite impressive," he said, referring to the cooperative agreement between the two governments.

Lollis, and some council members, said they were surprised when more than 10 gas station owners protested the letter during the Oral Communications portion of the regularly scheduled Council meeting Tuesday night. The businessmen seemed confident that the Tribe has plans to build a gas station on the property, and fear their businesses will suffer because the Tribe would be exempt from collecting state and local gas and sales taxes.

"We are fine with competition," said Taha Saleh, a former Council candidate and owner of the mini mart Shop and Save. "But we don't support something that would hurt our local businesses."

Fifth District Supervisor Mike Ennis also made an appearance in Council Chambers to oppose the endorsement, "no one seems to want to tell us what they're going to do out there," he said. But he explained in a phone interview Wednesday that he is also confident the Tribe will "put a whole bunch of retail businesses out there ... it'll kill your downtown area."

Council member Cameron Hamilton called the gas station owners' collective opposition "gang tactics," and asked the audience how the gas station rumor came about — no one responded.

"The gas station issue kind of surprised me, the only place I could think it could come from is that the Tribe does have Eagle Feather [Trading Post]," Councilman Pete McCracken said after the meeting. "It caught me off guard. I think the Tribe has been very forthcoming, but they're not certain what they want to do."

Several Tribal community members assured those watching the meeting, and the Council, that the Tribe's intentions are to adhere to the conditions of the Cooperation Agreement, and to continue boosting the local labor force.

"It appears we're trying to strong-arm the City ... but this is not a strong-arm move," Jesse Carillo, another former Council candidate and tribal member, said. "We are trying to work together. Instead of looking at the negative, I hope we look at the future and the positive."

Mayor Ron Irish excused himself from the vote due to a conflict of interest.

To read the letter, visit <http://www.ci.porterville.ca.us/govt/CityCouncil/Agendas/> or [www.recorderonline.com](http://www.recorderonline.com) after 10 a.m. today.

An Environmental Assessment of the impacts of changing the status of the Tribe's 40 acres is available for public review until July 26. The City Council's letter cites the assessment — which will be considered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as part of the Tule River Indian Tribe's application.

The "Proposed Trust Conveyance will not result in any significant unmitigated impacts to the environment pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)," the letter states.

It goes on to highlight three terms of the Cooperation Agreement, including seeking Council's approval for any new construction or development, and contributing financially to the City and community contributions to the to account for lost tax and impact fee revenues.

Contact Jenna Chandler at 784-5000, Ext. 1050, or [jchandler@portervillerecorder.com](mailto:jchandler@portervillerecorder.com).

© Copyright 2010 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)