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River Valley Times

Rancho Murieta, Sloughhouse, & Wilton, California

Residents organize to fight railcars being parked in Wilton

By Fran Soto

River Valley Times Staff - Wilton property owners along the inactive rail corridor that runs through Wilton and Elk Grove turned out at the Tuesday, April 7 meeting of Central Valley Rails to Trails Foundation (CVRTF) to join forces against the possibility of railcars being parked along the corridor.

Several officials attended the meeting including Sacramento County Supervisor Don Nottoli; Trent Sunahara, field representative for Congresswoman Doris Matsui; and Sarah Tomlinson, legislative assistant to Assembly member Joan Buchanan.

Although the focus of CVRTF for the past eight years has been to convert the corridor into an alternative route for recreational trails, their April meeting centered on the projected use by owners of the corridor - Union Pacific (UP). "Our mission is to work on the trail," said Betsy Mahan, president of CVRTF, to the property owners. "However, we felt it was our obligation to inform supporters of this development. This is really a property owners' issue, and we wanted to bring this to your attention."

Approximately 40 property owners from Wilton, Elk Grove and the Vineyard area in Sacramento were present. CVRTF board member Dr. Robert Hunter expressed his own reservations about the railcars. "I want to thank everyone for coming to see, as property owners, what our options are," said Hunter, who lives on the corridor. "It would be an eyesore and something I don't want to see happen."



Photo by Fran Soto

Property owners adjacent to the inactive Central California Traction corridor that runs through Wilton and Elk Grove gather to discuss what their options are to stop the parking of unused railcars along the corridor.

Nottoli focused on answering questions from the homeowners after giving a little background about CVRTF and expressing a willingness to help the property owners get the answers they need. "I think it is important to get the word out and ask UP representatives to attend the meetings to get some sense of where they are headed," Nottoli said. "I am more than willing to make the phone call. My view is they will come out and meet."

Some of the concerns raised by the homeowners included the rights of property owners, rules governing a rail yard opposed to an active corridor, what constitutes an abandoned corridor, responsibilities of the railroad, poor condition of the tracks for moving cars, safety and crime issues and how to contact property owners along the corridor. Mahan stressed that property owners were already dealing with issues of blocked access and were hiring attorneys to protect their rights as property owners. "A lot of you are hiring attorneys already. Don't accept that it's Union Pacific's own property and that they can do what they want," she said. "We are all obligated to be good neighbors. What is the obligation of the railroad to be a good neighbor?"

Mahan also said that past lists of adjacent property owners had been compiled, but that, at this time, CVRTF had no plans to update the list.

Supervisor Nottoli addressed those issues that fall under county jurisdiction, stating an inactive corridor is not an abandoned corridor and county consent is not required to repair tracks to move cars. "There is a formal process for abandonment," he said. "UP, as the property owner, only needs to contact the county when closing roads. No permits are required to do work on the corridor."

Sunahara reiterated that, to make an impact at the federal level, property owners should form a coalition, a suggestion echoed by Mahan. "You need to form a coalition and combine funds to have a voice," Sunahara said. "You need to go through a county or government agency in order to get to the federal level for funding."

At the conclusion of the open discussion, property owners agreed to consider forming a coalition and to contact neighbors and encourage them to attend the next meeting - tentatively set for two weeks. The location will be determined at a later date. Property owners interested in more information can e-mail to: cctneighbors@gmail.com for time, date and location of the next meeting.

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