

To: IB Area Chamber of Commerce
From: Roger Benham roger@Pond20forUs.com

SUBJECT: Pond 20 - Question to IB Area Chamber of Commerce

Dear Members:

I have to ask you, does it strike you as strange that the most important decision in the history of the IB Area is sent to the IB Chamber of Commerce membership as a haphazard email, from what appears to be a lobbyist organization, without any introduction or comments?

I am referring to the Cindy Gompper-Graves', South County Economic Development Council (SCEDC), email of July 16, 2015.

You would think that there would be some attention given to this historic giveaway of community assets, such as "ATTENTION ALL - MAJOR DECISION REGARDING THE FUTURE OF IB AREA ", "POND 20 NEWS FLASH - IS PORT REVERSING THEIR PROMISE?", or "HISTORIC DECISION AFFECTS YOU - WAS PUBLIC INPUT CONSIDERED?".

Pardon me if I have missed something in the Blogs, but, I do believe the Chamber of Commerce should make some kind of statement or survey in response to the Pond 20 decision. And, the statement should be emailed to the membership.

Below is my response, printed in the Eagle & Times newspaper of August 27, to Cindy Gompper-Graves' misleading Letter to the Editor titled "Thank you All", which is the exact language used in the email we received July 16th.

It is interesting to note, that in their substantial and expensive SCEDC "Visioning Survey", dated March 3, 2014, there is little or no response from the nearly 5,000 respondents asking for more "mitigation" business of habitat restoration. The top three business desires of the people surveyed were Healthcare, Energy Efficient and Clean Energy Business, and Tourism (I believe the real kind of tourism, not ecotourism that has proved to cost more than it generates). It amazing that these types of real economic developments are exactly what most people I speak with want to see for Pond 20.

Why does the SDEDC want mitigation? I believe it's because the SCEDC is a lobbying organization for businesses to the North, and could care less about the real wants and needs of the citizens of the IB Area.

What do you think should be done about this?

Sincerely,
Roger Benham, P.E.

Letter-to-the-Editor Exchange in Local IB Newspaper – IB Eagle & Times, August 27, 2015
Response to SCEDC Letter-to-Editor – Misleading and Supportive of Mitigation of Pond 20

Pond 20 – This Last Opportunity Could Be Lost – From Roger Benham
Rebuttal to SCEDC “Thank you All” Letter-to-Editor, July 2015 (copy provided below)

Having grown up in the immediate vicinity of Pond 20, I was very disappointed to read Cindy Gompper-Grave’s misleading letter entitled “Thank You All” regarding the pending give-away of this last remaining 95 acre parcel of the 850 acre Western Salt lands. The giving away of this land to special interest groups for their “land mitigation” needs, is a renegeing by the Port District on their promise to use Pond 20 for economic development for the IB Area.

In the first paragraph Ms. Gompers celebrates how she is "extremely proud" that Pond 20 was saved from being turned "into a mitigation bank despite previous promises of the site being saved for economic development". This misleadingly gives the impression that Pond 20 will be used for economic development.

When you read on, it says "there are 2 small sites that are available for development, and requested THE MAJORITY of Pond 20 to be placed into a mitigation bank". This is a total flip-flop of the opening paragraph.

I can guess where the "2 small sites" are located, and I can assure you that they will have comparatively nil impact on the economic and social improvements to the impoverished area around Pond 20. She neglects to mention other proposed uses for Pond 20, including a more advanced ecological preserve where people coexist with the wildlife, coinciding with a majority of Pond 20 being used for economic development.

Throughout the letter she refers to "net funds" being dedicated to "economic development" of the "Palm Avenue area". This sound very warm and fuzzy, but, like the "two small sites", no specifics are provided. What "net funds", from whom, and for whom? This is a degrading insult to the people of the IB Area. Is her group suggesting that the people of the IB Area should just be happy with whatever bone they throw, while the real value of Pond 20 is taken from us?

Together with their elite environmentalist friends, powerful economic interests are unfairly driving a fast-track give-away of the land of Pond 20 to mitigate development projects to the North. This is wrong. There must be a fair analysis of the immediate and long-term needs of the more impoverished IB Area, BEFORE a decision is made to use a single square foot of Pond 20 to mitigate development projects to the North.

A significant amount of Ms. Gompers letter is used to congratulate various people. This attempts to give credence to their actions as if there was a lot of public input. There was not.

Huge accolades are given to Jim Janney, the prior mayor of IB. It was under his mayorship that the 9th & Palm Miracle Shopping Center and NIFCU were given away to a Developer for \$1 in 2009. After that

deal was deemed illegal, it was followed by another sham that gave away the title to the property for \$213K without any vote, referendum, or competing bids. I suspect that about \$14 million of public funds were used, and the site is a vacant dirt lot to this day.

The author finalizes the letter with a comment about "BALANCE". Yet, an examination of the facts will show that, once again, the IB Area is getting the short end of the stick. Already, without vote or referendum, 90% of the Western Salt property, along with untold amounts of the TJ River Valley, has been given away to "mitigate" development needs to the North. Haven't the people of the IB Area given enough? This is unbridled greed on the part of the self-serving land mitigation interests.

To its detriment, the IB Area gets ALL THE IMBALANCED BURDENS of land mitigation, while the North gets all the benefits of economic development. In other words, the residents and children of the IB Area are reduced to beggar status, while the North gets richer.

Obviously, the "better tomorrow" she refers to is for the special interests groups to the North, while the IB Area is being manipulated into perpetual impoverishment by the narrow agenda of self-serving special interest groups. This pending action must be stopped.

Sincerely,

Roger Benham
619-424-6226

Roger Alan Benham is author of the book "Downtown IB and other Fundamental Needs of the IB Area", published in 2014.

Cindy Gomper Graves Letter to Editor
Printed in IB Eagle & Times, July 2015

Today I am extremely proud of our South County EDC Members. At the July Annual meeting South County EDC members were asked to vote on action regarding Pond 20, an abandoned salt flat that borders the cities of Imperial Beach and San Diego on Palm Avenue. The Port was considering putting this site into a mitigation bank despite previous promises of the site being saved for economic development efforts. The Port heard the issue yesterday and I wanted to share the outcome with you and also take this opportunity to thank those who have dedicated a lot of time toward this effort.

SCEDC had requested that the Port determine which portions of the site were developable and move aggressively to get those developed. Additionally, SCEDC requested net funds derived from the sale of land for mitigation purposes be placed in a separate fund and dedicated to economic development efforts in Imperial Beach and the City of San Diego's portion of the Palm Avenue area.

At yesterday's hearing the Port recognized that there are 2 small sites that are available for development, and requested the majority of Pond 20 be placed into a mitigation bank. Additionally, as part of the same motion made by Commissioner Malcom and seconded by Commissioner Nelson, the Port unanimously agreed to set aside net funds from the mitigation bank and direct those funds toward economic development efforts in Imperial Beach and District 8 in San Diego. They also asked staff to return with a policy that directed the Port on use of those funds. Most amazing was to hear South County EDC members AND environmental agencies agree funds should be set aside for economic development efforts.

SCEDC members have worked long and hard on Pond 20. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Jim Janney and Doug Pau who have lead the charge over the last 4 years for SCEDC. And Port Commissioner Maclom has worked on Pond 20 since he was a Councilmember in the late 90's.

Yesterday our members did a fantastic job of conveying what the SCEDC Board wanted and our thanks go out to them. Those members included: Monica Montano, Xema Jacobson, Miguel Aguirre, Doug Kerner, Doug Paul, Jim Janney, Tony McCune, Clarissa Falcon, Marcela Escobar-Eck. Marcela also communicated SCEDC's position to the Wildlife Advisory Board where she serves as the SCEDC representative. And our partners at the San Diego Regional EDC sent over Shey who did an equally great job of testifying in support of our requested action. A huge thank you to all who stressed the importance of BALANCE in a community—and that balance must include economic development. You were heard yesterday. You made a difference yesterday. And, thank you for making a better tomorrow.

Cindy
Cindy Gompper-Graves