

Hills ranchland dispute clouds plan revision

By Marianne Napoles

The City of Chino Hills will hold in limbo a zoning designation for ranchland until a potential conflict in the general plan is researched and resolved.

At issue is the density of development in southeastern Chino Hills, potentially pitting landowners' property rights against longtime residents who want to cleave to the 1994 general plan density.

Community development director Joann Lombardo recommended to the planning commission Tuesday that no changes be made despite a plea from landowners in southeastern Chino Hills to allow one unit per five acres, and not one unit per 40 acres as the original general plan specifies.

Ms. Lombardo said "severe complexities" would make it difficult to reach an agreement in a timely manner.

Rick Hoffman, who represents a buyer for the 1,200-acre Lamb property surrounding Chino Hills State Park, urged the commission to allow one unit per five acres. "I would urge you to not leave this in limbo," he said. "Take action. I know it won't be fun but it's not fair to potential development that could bring good things to the city and it's not fair to the owners of the property."

Claire Schlotterbeck, executive director of Hills for Everyone, the organization that founded the Chino Hills State Park, said Thursday she was concerned about the possibility of a one unit per five acre designation.

Ms. Schlotterbeck said the battle over density was fought and won many years

ago when the city zoned land along the 71 Freeway one unit per 40 acres.

She said Chino Hills residents requested the designation.

"City planners listened and called it a development reserve," she said. "I remember. I was there.

"Somehow, the city documents are now confusing. Is it one unit per five acres or one unit per 40?" Ms. Schlotterbeck asked.

"We understand why the planning commission passed the updated general plan and ducked this density issue," she said. "More research is needed."

She said Hills for Everyone jump-started the research with a public records request.

Vice chairman Mike Stover said the landowners are concerned that restricting development to one unit per 40 acres might prevent them from constructing the number of homes they want.

Jim Mulligan, who represented the Abacherli family, asked if their rural parcel would be affected.

Ms. Lombardo said the Abacherli property is zoned low density residential and that zoning designation would not change.

Several representatives of the Lamb family, which owns 1,200 acres of land surrounding the Chino Hills State Park also expressed concern.

Commissioners said they did not want to hold up the general plan while resolving the matter. Mr. Stover said the property representatives are nervous about what concessions they might have to make and are not keen on the idea of having to negotiate with Hills for Everyone.