

The Valley Floor Myth Vs. Reality

Myth: "Preservation = Condemnation"

Reality: Preservation is an outcome. Condemnation is a process. Preservation can be achieved in many ways. Condemnation is just the most expensive, confrontational and belligerent.

Myth: "Condemnation is the only way to bring SMVC to the table. It levels the playing field and gives the town more power in dealing with this adversary"

Reality: SMVC has said it will come to the table to plan with the community if the condemnation ordinance fails. If it passes, SMVC will not come to the table and will instead commit its resources to vigorously fighting the condemnation action.

Myth: "We can't afford not to condemn. Property values will only go up"

Reality: Nonsense. John Steel initially proposed a two -year moratorium. SMVC has agreed to cut that time in half, to one year, to show that this is not a stalling tactic on its part. We all know the real estate market is relatively flat. To suggest we don't have the time to negotiate in good faith is simply wrong.

Myth: SMVC plans to do massive resort development"

Reality: This is a crude scare tactic and should be seen as such. In Charlie Haas's recent letter to the editor, he stated that SMVC has no plans for "Summit County-style development." In response to the wishes of the community, he also committed to no golf course on the Valley Floor. Those photos being run by the "Committee to Free the Valley Floor" are a perfect example of campaign tactics at their worst.

Myth: "The Town's plan means the South side of the Valley Floor will be preserved as open space in perpetuity because it will give an environmental organization a conservation easement."

Reality: Even conservation easements are no guarantee that land will be preserved in perpetuity, especially when that easement is granted by the Town (no tax implications if we back out of it.). As Leslie Fields admitted during the Q&A work session on June 4th, conservation easements can be condemned, just like any other property right. If the Town changed its mind at some point in the future, it could condemn the conservation easement to build just about anything, so long as it had a public purpose.

Myth: "SMVC has no plans to restore the river"

Reality: Wrong. In Charlie Haas's recent letter to the Town, SMVC committed to participating in a public/private partnership with the Town and with San Miguel County to restore the San Miguel River to its original channel. SMVC also committed to providing a river corridor park and trail for public use along the river.

Myth: SMVC has no intention of preserving open space on the Valley Floor"

Reality: Over 65% of the South side is wetlands, the river corridor or the 100-year floodplain. These are undevelopable areas, protected by federal, state and county regulations. SMVC has committed to preserving these wetlands (contrary to the assertion that it secretly intends to drain them), to providing a river corridor park for public use, to providing space for bluegrass parking and camping, and to preserve scenic view corridors (also required by the County, which, by the way has tougher environmental regulations than the Town has). When combined with SMVC's statement that "nothing is off the table" and "we are willing to look at tall options" we are clearly in a position to begin serious and substantive negotiations with the landowner.

Myth: "We should spend the Open Space funds to acquire the Valley Floor. That's what they're there for"

Reality: There is only \$6M in the Open Space fund. To get more, we have to approve increasing the bonding capacity and use the bonding capacity. We may not raise taxes to do this, but that doesn't mean the money is free. We will be taking out a loan to purchase property that is mostly already protected by environmental laws! What else could open space funds be used for? What about using our six million to buy other properties or to maintain the open space we already have?

Myth: "This condemnation action will not hinder siting a new school. The School District could condemn property on the north side, if necessary."

Reality: This is flat wrong. While it is true that the school district has the power of condemnation, it is also the case that it cannot afford the property. It may also be the case, as suggested by the proponents of condemnation, that the community will not approve the bonds to make such a purchase. SMVC has committed to providing a school site on the Valley Floor. Why don't we talk with them to find out how that could work?

Myth: "There have already been meaningful negotiations with SMVC - condemnation is the only alternative left."

Reality: Wrong. In fact, no negotiations have taken place. What proponents of condemnation are calling 'negotiation' are one-sided demands to sell the land 'or else.'

Myth: "Open Space is important to the preservation of our community"

Reality: This is where we all agree. We all moved here and stayed here because of the natural beauty of this place. But let's see if the negotiations with the landowner won't get us where we hope to be, without entering into a divisive and costly condemnation battle. Let's not be forced into making false choices on the north side between environmentally sensitive land and land for truly affordable housing, for schools, for recreational facilities and for all the other public needs this community has that require land. Let's try to work with the landowner before heading down the path of confrontation.

WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE.

NEGOTIATE FIRST!

**P.S. Vote for Michael Bocchini and Degray Phillips...
Two long-term locals who really care.**

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