

Industry scooping up 30 acres of wilderness in Orange County

By Ben Baeder, Staff Writer

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INDUSTRY - While cities across California are struggling to pay their bills in the wake of the demise of redevelopment agencies, Industry today will likely buy 30 acres of vacant canyon land in Orange County.

The City Council at this morning's meeting will vote whether to pay \$400,000 for a flag-shaped lot in a hilly area of unincorporated Orange County.

"We already have all that land back there, and we thought this was a good deal," Industry Mayor Dave Perez said, referring to the 3,000 acres the city owns in Tonner Canyon. "We're going to keep it open space, just like we've been doing with the rest of our property."

The land is being sold by Jack R. Harding of Scottsdale, Ariz., according to city documents.

The city since 2001 has been buying up land in the canyon, including about 2,400 acres in Los Angeles County and 525 acres in Orange County.

The 30 acres on today's agenda would be at the southern end of its property. As a crow flies, the flag-shaped lot is about a mile northeast of Brea Olinda High School. It doesn't have an address. The Orange County Assessor's parcel number is 306-021-06.

Orange County Supervisor Sean Nelson, whose district includes Brea, said he wasn't worried about the purchase.

"I can't imagine them wanting to build a home or anything else back there," he said. "They would be looking at the back of (the Alpha Olinda) landfill. I remain open minded and interested about what they've got going on."

Officials from Brea said they are concerned, but they declined to officially comment because they only learned about the possible sale Wednesday.

Claire Schlotterbeck, executive of the Brea-based Hills For Everyone open-space preservation group, said preservationists are still curious why Industry continues to stockpile land in the canyon.

When it bought the first 2,400 acres in 2001, city officials said they were thinking about using the canyon as a reservoir. At the time, the land was a Boy Scout reservation.

Since then, city officials backed off that idea, claiming the city plans to keep the canyon as open space.

Industry primarily uses the land for recreational uses for children, including youth outreach events by the sheriff's department and for Boy Scouts of America camp outs. It is not open to the public.

Schlotterbeck said the acreage - which is covered with oak woodlands - is some of the most ecologically valuable land in Southern California.

The city is paying a fair market price, she said, noting that a recent purchase of similar open space went for \$10,000 an acre.

Preservation groups would have been interested in buying the parcel she said.

"The short way of saying it is that, yes, we would have liked a chance," she said. "But it really depends what's on the land."

Old pipelines, oil drilling equipment or other junk could lead to an expensive cleanup, she said. According to the legal description of the property, it was once part of an oil field.

The purchase agreement between Harding and the city states that the land was not contaminated and does not have any buried storage tanks.

Assemblyman Chris Norby, R-Fullerton, represents the area Industry is planning to buy.

He thinks Industry officials still want to build a reservoir and create a power company.

He questioned whether Industry, which has about 200 residents, should have the right to jump county lines to buy land.

"They're essentially a land-speculation company," he said. "We're keeping an eye on it."

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