

# Industry City Council looks to develop land for possible utility project

By Ben Baeder, Staff Writer, SGV Tribune 3/17/13

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INDUSTRY -- An energy project may be taking shape in the wilderness area north of Brea.

The Industry City Council and a developer with deep political connections to the state's Democratic party have signed a 6-month exclusive development agreement to explore a public project on 525 acres of city-owned land in unincorporated Orange County. The Industry City Council on Thursday voted to allow La Jolla-based Industry Water and Power to explore a potential development on the land.

Bill Barkett, a farmer, developer and energy expert, is listed as the principal for Industry Water and Power.

Barkett did not return a call for this story.

Barkett and his family are major contributors to the state's Democratic candidates, including \$58,000 in donations for the 2009-2010 election cycle. Gov. Jerry Brown received \$25,900 of Barkett's donations, according to the California Secretary of State. Barkett's wife, Lisa, donated the same amount to Brown, according to state records. City Manager Kevin Radecki said Industry Water and Power is in an exploratory phase. "We really won't know what he thinks he can do with that property until the end of this six-month period," he said.

In all, Industry owns about 5,700 acres in the Tonner Canyon area. The properties fall in Orange, San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties.

When Industry initially bought the 525 acres near Brea in the early 2000s, the buy was challenged by environmental groups, who said Industry needed to conduct an environmental review to buy and develop the land. Industry's lawyers argued in court that they didn't need such a review because they planned to use the property for open space. Industry prevailed.

"We are definitely are concerned, because this right in our backyard," said Eirc Nicoll, Brea's community development director. "They misrepresented themselves in court. We'll be monitoring this. "

Environmental groups are also watching what happens with the project.

"It certainly blows away their position that they bought Brea Canyon oil for open space and nature preservation," said Claire Schlotterbeck, executive director of the open-space advocacy group Hills for Everyone.