

Prescott City Council rejects resolution from Save the Dells

City officials concerned with drawing 'line in the sand' too early



Prescott third-grader Suli Sherman speaks to the Prescott City Council on Tuesday, March 26, in support of the Save the Dells organization's position on open space in the Granite Dells. (Cindy Barks/Courier)

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Photo Gallery

[Save The Dells At Prescott City Council](#)



It was likely the largest turnout for a Prescott City Council meeting in recent memory, but the 1,000 or so people who showed up at City Hall on Tuesday, March 26, went away without the desired city endorsement.

In the highly charged consideration of the Save the Dells organization's push for more open space in the Dells, the City Council ended up unanimously voting against the resolution endorsing the organization's position.

The vote came after nearly 20 speakers made impassioned appeals, and supporters filled the council chambers and lobby, the street in front of City Hall, and the Prescott Public Library's Founder's Suite.

At issue was a petition signed by more than 5,000 people, asking the City Council to approve a resolution in support of Save the Dells' position that 500 acres of the land being eyed for development by Arizona Eco Development be preserved as a regional park.

'HISTORY WILL JUDGE US'

Tom Rusing of Save the Dells submitted the petition to the council about a month ago, and he made a presentation on Tuesday, urging the council members to officially support the organization's stand.

Calling the area around the Point of Rocks “part of the heart and soul of Prescott,” Rusing told the council that “history will judge us” on the decisions made about preservation of the area.

Most of those who spoke after Rusing also were adamantly in favor of the Save the Dells petition.

Among the supporters was Suli Sherman, a third-grader at Skyview School, who had to use a step ladder to reach the podium microphone to tell the council about her research on the Dells.

“Out of the all of the public natural places in Prescott, most residents think that the Dells are very important,” Sherman said.

Other speakers maintained that the council should follow the wishes of the public to preserve the Dells.

“Council, you represent the people of Prescott, and the people of Prescott want you to pass this,” Amber Fields, vice chair of Save the Dells, said of the resolution.

While the vast majority of the speakers were in favor of the resolution, the council also heard from two speakers who emphasized the rights of private-property owners to decide how to use their land.

Grant Quezada told the council that while he loves “the beauty and the greatness of the Dells,” he added, “I hold higher the beauty and greatness of the Constitution.”



Several hundred Save the Dells supporters gather outside Prescott City Hall to show their opposition against the planned Arizona Eco Development and annexation of some of the Granite Dells area Tuesday, March 26 in Prescott.

(Les Stukenberg/Courier)

‘A BINDING STATEMENT’

Despite the outcome of the meeting, it was clear neither side saw the council’s vote as the end of the matter.

A majority of council members expressed wishes that further negotiations with the developer would lead to preservation of more than the 255 acres of open space proposed in a conceptual plan submitted to the city on Monday, March 25.

City Attorney Jon Paladini prefaced the council’s discussion with a legal explanation of what approval of the resolution would mean to the city’s future actions on the Arizona Eco project.

Noting that Save the Dells supporters had referred to the resolution as “non-binding,” Paladini said, “This concept of a non-binding resolution — for purposes of the city, there’s no such thing.”

Approval of the resolution would indicate that the city would accept nothing less in terms of open space, Paladini said, adding that the council would send the message, “If you don’t meet this threshold, don’t bother to apply.”

And Mayor Greg Mengarelli pointed out that while the city has received conceptual information from Arizona Eco, the company has yet to file a full official application for annexation into the city.

Calling the Save the Dells resolution “well-intentioned,” Mengarelli said approval by the council would amount to “essentially drawing a line in the sand before the applicant gets to the starting point.”

Councilman Steve Sischa voiced concerns that approval of the resolution could amount to an all-or-nothing message. Although noting that he is not ready to vote in favor of annexing the Arizona Eco land into city limits, Sischa said, “I’m also not ready to vote for ‘500 acres or nothing.’”

Former Save the Dells chair Joe Trudeau expressed some optimism after the vote. In remarks to supporters who gathered outside City Hall afterward, he said, “I don’t see this as a loss for us.”

Trudeau stressed that council members had “voiced a lot of sentiment that we can all feel good about. They all showed their interest and commitment in working towards our 500-acre goal.”

Although developer Jason Gisi was not in attendance at Tuesday's meeting, he said Monday that final submission of the entire annexation application could happen by later this week.

That would set off what is expected to be a months-long review and public-meeting process on the proposed annexation and development plan.