

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

Annexation appeal gets denied

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The federal government has denied an appeal filed by four Santa Ynez citizen groups seeking to prevent the Chumash Tribe from annexing 6.9 acres off Highway 246 into its reservation.

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Board of Indian Appeals determined that the groups - Santa Ynez Valley Concerned Citizens, Preservation of Los Olivos, Preservation of Santa Ynez and Women's Environmental Watch of the Santa Ynez Valley - did not have the legal standing necessary to appeal the January 2005 approval of the tribe's request.

In May 2002, the Chumash submitted a request to the government for approval of the annexation, which would support a cultural center, park and 27,600-square-foot retail building. Once the Chumash annex land, it no longer is subject to county planning regulations or tax rolls.

In a document released earlier this month, federal officials said that many of the group's reasons for opposing the annexation are not a direct result of this annexation.

“There are a host of lessons to be learned. We are by no means finished,” said C.J. Jackson of the concerned citizens. “It's a set back, and we're disappointed.” With this decision, the groups will not have the opportunity to argue why they are against the intensification of the Chumash property.

At that time, Santa Barbara County had an opportunity to protest the request, but waived the right in an attempt to negotiate with the tribe, primarily to ensure gambling wouldn't take place on the newly acquired

land.

When negotiation attempts failed, the county wrote a letter supporting the group's appeal, but was too late to take any legal action on its own.

“This really reinforces that elected officials and county officials need to take the lead and be proactive in protecting their communities,” Jackson said.

“You can't react, you've got to know what your procedures and structures are that are open to you and be prepared to respond to them.”

Jackson added that the groups are researching what other options they have in the matter and are “by no means done.”