

Sagebrush Petition Accepted by LACOE's LACCSDO



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Photo by Charly SHELTON

Harry Leon, Vice President of Crescenta Valley Town Council, speaks to the LACCSDO in opposition of the Sagebrush transfer.

By Charly SHELTON

Yesterday morning, several stakeholders in the Sagebrush territory transfer option were on hand at the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization meeting at the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Parent group UniteLCF has backed a petition and gathered 724 verified signatures to transfer the Sagebrush territory from Glendale Unified School District to La Cañada Unified School District. This battle is over the area west of Rosebank Drive in La Cañada to Pickens Canyon, known as the Sagebrush territory, and has been going on sporadically since the 1960s. It is now officially moving toward a final answer, one way or the other.

The LACCSDO is an 11-member committee whose purview is specifically to decide which tracts of homes are assigned to which school district. That process will entail accepting the verified petition, which was the subject of Wednesday's meeting, before moving on to two public forums – one in GUSD territory and one in LCSD territory – to hear from the public before the issue is brought back to the LACCSDO for deliberation and a vote on whether or not the transfer will take place. Their goal, as was stated at the meeting, is first and foremost to do what is best for the students.

The committee accepted the petition but would not discuss or respond to the issue. It did, however, allow members of the public to speak for two minutes to express their sentiments in favor of or opposition to the transfer.

The speakers in favor of the transfer represented UniteLCF and LCUSD.

“My motivations have been and always will be doing what’s right to correct something that happened almost a century ago where the same thing happened – there was a convenient line that was used to establish the district boundaries and that’s now dividing a community,” said Tom Smith, chair of UniteLCF and first signed proponent of the petition.



Smith, a retired TV executive, has been the head of the pro-transfer movement from its inception in 2013 and has since “reluctantly moved away to be with family, closer to home” and is no longer a La Cañada resident. Some of the other members of UniteLCF have been fighting for the transfer since the 1970s when they were seeking change for their children and now seek change for their grandchildren.

Speakers in opposition to the transfer were present at the podium as well, representing GUSD, Crescenta Valley Town Council and concerned parents from the community.

“Simply put, we are opposed to this transfer for a litany of reasons that have already been shared, but I’ll just iterate this one important note: we haven’t found an educational reason for the transfer of such property. Glendale Unified School District is a fine district with award-winning schools serving the families and students in the Sagebrush area successfully, meeting the academic as well as the social and emotional needs of the students,” said Winfred Roberson Jr., the “proud superintendent” of GUSD.

All in all, five people spoke in opposition to the transfer and three spoke in favor.

This is the beginning of a long road of public forums, discussions, reviews by the LACCSDO and an eventual vote. If the committee votes in favor of the transfer, it is passed up the line to a higher review board, and this is where the UniteLCF petitions of the past have fallen short.

“There have been a number of petitions brought forth to this committee before that every time have been approved at this level, only to be turned around as somebody at a higher level reviews it,” Smith said.

Although the committee cannot discuss or deliberate on the issue, committee member AJ Willmer did speak up about a possible conflict of interest.

“It’s a small world, but I should mention this,” Willmer said. “I have a good acquaintance who I meet with regularly in my Rotary Club who lives in the petition area and over the last couple of years we’ve had quite a few discussions about the process for school district reorganization and the integral [things]...”

Willmer added he also works with a man on a “regular basis” who lives in the Sagebrush area and that he had a “stronger connection to this (issue) than normal, but I don’t feel conflicted. If I do I will let you know.”

No dates for the public forums have been announced yet, but they must be scheduled within 60 days. Check CVWeekly in the coming weeks for more information as it is made available.