

MIRA LOMA: Attorney general joins in warehouse fight

10:24 PM PDT on Wednesday, September 7, 2011

BY DAVID DANIELSKI
STAFF WRITER
ddanielski@pe.com

State Attorney General Kamala Harris has joined a community's legal battle to block construction of warehouses and a business center planned near a northwest Riverside County neighborhood already plagued by air pollution.

Harris contends in court papers submitted this week that Riverside County failed to adequately analyze the environmental consequences of the planned Mira Loma Commerce Center, especially its effects on traffic and air pollution from diesel trucks in the area. Mira Loma has among the worst air quality in the nation.

Harris is scheduled to visit the area today, then meet with residents at the offices of the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice. The Glen Avon-based environmental group filed a lawsuit in July, seeking to rescind Riverside County supervisors' unanimous approval of the business center.

Story continues below



Kamala Harris

The project site is near Mira Loma Village, a neighborhood of mostly low-income, Hispanic families. Hundreds of diesel trucks pass nearby on their way to and from the dozens of warehouses that dominate the landscape near the Highway 60-Interstate 15 interchange.

"We are absolutely thrilled the attorney general is stepping in to protect these families," said Penny Newman, executive director of the environmental group.

Riverside County spokesman Ray Smith said county attorneys need to review the information submitted by the attorney general before they decide how to respond.

Harris's motion to intervene in the lawsuit is scheduled for a hearing Sept. 16 in Riverside County Superior Court. Harris will explain today why she wants to be involved in the litigation, attorney general spokeswoman Linda Glenhill said.

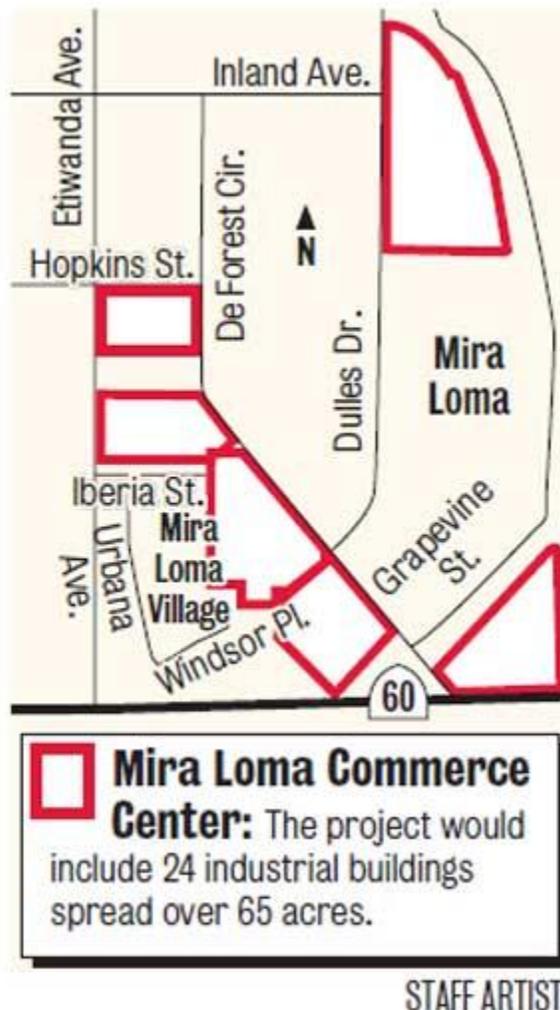
Papers the state submitted to the court say the project could harm the health of people living in Mira Loma Village, 101 homes on the east side of Etiwanda Avenue, north of Highway 60. The business development would border the village on the north and east.

"The diesel exhaust from the trucks accessing the warehouses poses a serious risk of cancer, respiratory illnesses, and other adverse health effects," state attorneys said in court papers.

The commerce center would consist of 24 industrial buildings with a total area of 1.1 million square feet. The buildings would be on six sites across 65 acres straddling Mira Loma and Glen Avon, communities that are within the newly incorporated city of Jurupa Valley.

The developers include the Japan-based Obayashi Corp., Investment Building Group RGA Office of Architectural Design and OC Real Estate Management LLC. Representatives of the companies could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Story continues below



County supervisors approved the plan in May, disappointing residents who had opposed it vigorously in numerous hearings over nine years. Supervisor John Tavaglione, who represents the area, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Newman's group has been opposing warehouse development in Mira Loma since the 1990s because of the area's pollution problems.

Mira Loma for decades has been identified by air quality officials as an air pollution hot spot. In 2000, a study by USC's medical school researchers blamed the high levels of fine-particle pollution for stunted lung development in children. Diesel exhaust is the most toxic component of fine particles, a form of pollution linked to heart disease, depression and other ailments.

Harris' involvement shows "the seriousness of the situation and how nonchalant the county has been in addressing the damage they are doing to the community," Newman said.

County officials have said the warehouse industry has bolstered the Inland economy and uses land left vacant by dairy farmers who have moved their operations to the San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere.

Harris contends in court papers that the county did not adequately examine the project's impact on a community that already has a "disproportionately high amount of distribution warehousing"; failed to adopt measures that could have made the project more compatible with the community; and did not adequately consider reasonable alternatives.

Newman said the project would put the industrial buildings too close to people's homes, among other issues