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City of Irvine Adopts Rezoning of ARDA Site for Veterans Cemetery 4-1 Vote in favor or rezoning stuns city residents

Irvine, CA (May 13, 2020) — Watching a closed-to-the-public session, television viewers sat in disbelief as Irvine Councilmembers Farrah Khan, Mellissa Fox, Andrew Kuo and Mike Carroll, voted to adopt the citizen-supported initiative measure to rezone the original 125-acre City-owned ARDA site at the Great Park exclusively for a Veterans Cemetery. The lone dissenting vote came from Mayor Shea, whose motion to put the measure on the November ballot did not receive a second. After Shea's failed motion, Councilmember Khan put forth the motion to adopt the citizens' initiative as a City ordinance. Jane Roschmann, a volunteer supporter of the measure, viewing the proceedings from her home said, *"I could not believe my ears! I was sure I heard it wrong."*

Volunteers Jubilant...But See Lots of Work Ahead

An all-volunteer citizens group collected 19,795 signatures during a petition drive that ended March 17, 2020 in an example of direct democracy that delivered a message to the Council that they wanted the veterans cemetery project back on track, at the original site in the Great Park. The group expected more delays, which they anticipated would lead to a pitched battle during the November election. Instead, their hard work paid off with the Council implementing the will of the voters.

Marketing Director for the petition effort, Tom Chomyn expressed his delight with the Council decision, saying, *"We've been having this fight for years, and it always comes down to Mayor Shea and the Council ignoring the will of Irvine residents and siding with the developers. It's time they began listening to the citizens."* And, Kev Abazajian, a candidate for City Council in 2018 agreed, *"Tens of thousands of Irvine residents have repeatedly said: Let's build the Veterans Cemetery at its original location, and let's do that now!"*

Larry Agran, former Irvine Mayor, councilmember and the force behind the petition-signature drive expressed cautious optimism, saying: *"The people were heard last night. This is an important first step, but now we have to get it done!"*

After a Decade of Studies, Council Directs Staff to Consider a Dedication Ceremony

The ARDA site, deeded to the City of Irvine in 2010, has been studied on numerous occasions over the past decade. In 2016, both the Federal and State government approved a 333-page concept plan for the Veterans Cemetery on the ARDA site. In June 2018, the site was studied during the Measure B campaign. In that election, Irvine voters proclaimed by a 63% to 37% margin that the original ARDA site was the preferred location for the Veterans Cemetery, rejecting a proposed land-swap between the City and FivePoint Holdings. An immediate next step is a possible dedication ceremony at the ARDA site. More importantly, the land must be transferred to the state before actual progress can be made.

Ray Roschmann is a volunteer press liaison, writing on behalf of the Build the Great Park Veterans Cemetery committee. The campaign website is <https://buildtheveteranscemetery.org/>

If you would like more information, videos or photos on this topic, please contact Ray Roschmann. Call or text Ray at (949) 854-4793, or email him at rayroschmann@cox.net