



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, August 18, 2022

Media Contacts:

Mr. Santiago Maestas, President, South Valley Regional Association of Acequias, (505) 877-8200, maestasy@netzero.com

Ms. Marcia Fernandez, Contra Santolina Working Group, (505) 877-9727, mbfernandez1@gmail.com

Dr. Virginia Necochea, Executive Director, New Mexico Environmental Law Center, (505) 304-8724
vnecochea@nmelc.org

Ms. Mia Montoya Hammersley, Staff Attorney, New Mexico Environmental Law Center, (505) 989-9022, mhammersley@nmelc.org

Ms. Maslyn Locke, Staff Attorney, New Mexico Environmental Law Center, (505) 989-9022, mlocke@nmelc.org

Community Responds to Bernalillo County Commission Approval of Santolina Tire Dump

ALBUQUERQUE, NM—The Bernalillo County Commission voted 4-0 in favor of an amended Santolina Level A Master Plan and 3-0 to approve the Level B.II Master plan during their 4-hour-long hearing on Tuesday, August 16. Commissioner Pyskoty was absent for both votes, and Commissioner Barboa lost her internet connection during the second vote. She had indicated an intention to support both plans during the discussion.

The Level A Master Plan was approved by the County back in 2015, but the massive housing development has never been built. The original plan called for 37,000 homes for approximately 95,000 people that would use more than 3.8 billion gallons of water per year. However, the developers, Western Albuquerque Land Holdings and Consensus Planning, Inc., have never been able to obtain the required water availability agreement from the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority.

Without any commitment for the water, developers instead asked the County to approve a project that would not require any demonstration of water availability, seeking to develop only about 630 acres of the 13,700 total acres for a tire recycling plant, a landfill, and other vaguely described uses.

On March 2nd, the County Planning Commission recommended denial of both plans because the developers could not adequately justify the changes to the Level A Master

Plan and could not explain where any water required for the Level B.II plan would come from. **Despite the CPC's recommendation for denial, all Bernalillo County Commission members who were present voted in support of both plans, even after receiving scathing criticism from the public who were 100 percent opposed to both plans.** Of the many people who spoke during public comment, all were opposed. Not one person spoke in favor of the Santolina project.

Inadequate Access to the Hearing for the Public

There were multiple issues with access to the hearing online, which was held both on Zoom and in person. Many people who had signed up on the county website per instructions were removed from the zoom meeting and unable to get back in. The County's YouTube video live stream kept going down. In fact, the [YouTube video](#) of the four-hour long hearing is missing over an hour and is only 2 hours and 47 minutes long. Many people also complained that the page on the [county website](#) for signing up to speak did not work at all. Thus, **the public was denied adequate opportunity to participate in the hearing** and to share their views and concerns.

The County also did not follow its own procedures for how such cases are handled. As NMELC Staff Attorneys Mia Montoya Hammersley and Maslyn Locke made clear, the only way these plans should have been heard by the Commission is if the CPC denial on March 2nd was appealed, which it was not. Community members noted that when it comes to rules and procedures, the developers are held to a different standard than concerned members of the public.

Virginia Necochea, a founding member of the Contra Santolina Working Group and Executive Director of NMELC, said, "We WILL NOT buy into this false notion that the people of Atrisco deserve to be left with a legacy of a tire plant and landfill. The developer and the County said the tire recycling will include something called ASR—Automotive Shredder Residue—and "auto shredder fluff," which contains mercury, lead, cadmium, chromium, arsenic, polyvinyl chloride and PCBs. We will continue to demand justice and to take a firm stand against those who continue to put profits over people. New Mexico is not for sale. ¡Seguimos en la batalla!

Jorge Garcia, Executive Director of CESOSS, said, "Our elected officials should avoid stating that community members are 'misinformed.' They are not misinformed, they have invested countless hours and years to think through all these issues. Instead of stating offensive comments, commissioners should demand that every angle that is presented by the community is followed and reviewed as a form of respecting the communities that believed in your leadership."

Marcia Fernandez, South Valley resident and farmer, said, "This decision continues the creation of the South Valley as a 'sacrifice zone' for Bernalillo County. We have the sewer plant, SuperFund sites, Cerro Colorado landfill, Southwest Landfill for

construction debris. Perhaps other parts of the county would like to share in this wealth of undesirable sites.”

Elaine Hebard, member of the Contra Santolina Working Group, said, “It’s past time to put a dagger into the heart of this unplanned community. The issue is not whether a solar farm, or even a tire dump, is good. Each of the suggested uses might be sound. But are they the vision of an integrated community? Perhaps more realistically, Santolina should be changed to a planned industrial park. The BCC should also run its own economic model, this time not relying solely on the developers’ data.”

Kristine Suozzi, former State Director of the Dept. of Health, Public Health Division, said, “The Proposed Santolina Development is not needed, not wanted, and is at best, piecemeal sprawl, not a planned community. Sprawl development threatens public health with increases in chronic diseases and would be injurious to the residents of Bernalillo County.”

The **Contra Santolina Working Group** posted a statement on their [Facebook](#) page, saying, “Although our disappointment runs deep, we will continue to stay in the battle. We encourage everyone to take a moment to reach out to Chair Adriann Barboa and the rest of the commissioners to express your concerns and disappointment: (505) 468-7108, District3@bernco.gov.”

#####