

Good morning. I am Noel Ragsdale a resident of Sky Valley. I have been appointed by the Sky Valley Homeowners Association to make this presentation on behalf of our 127 members who voted on February 21, 2013 to join the Sky Valley Community Council in unanimously opposing a Public Use Permit for ANKA.

I want to express our appreciation to Supervisor Benoit for the attention that he has personally given to this proposal, the community concerns that have been raised about it and the procedures surrounding ANKA's application for a Public Use Permit. When this application was reviewed by the Riverside Planning Commission on November 7, 2012, I appeared on behalf of the Sky Valley Community Council to correct the staff report which stated that the Council had approved the application and to request a continuance so that the Council could formally review it at its next scheduled meeting on November 13, 2012. ANKA did not support our request for a continuance and the Commission proceeded to vote on the application with no input from the Community Council. It was not until ANKA appeared at the November 13th Council meeting that it provided the community with correct information concerning many key aspects of this proposed facility. Without Supervisor Benoit's subsequent intervention, we would not be here today to express important community concerns about this proposal.

First, we believe that the proposed application for the PUP should be denied in order to uphold respect for, and compliance with, the legal processes which the County has established for approving land uses -- and not encourage, indeed reward, those who have flouted the law. The site of this proposed facility has been an unauthorized land use for over 20 years. ANKA has suggested its PUP should be granted because the site was a licensed facility, but this is completely irrelevant to the issue at hand. The facility NEVER had a County land use permit that would have allowed input from the public before issuance. ANKA -- a sophisticated corporate entity -- purchased this property in 2008 knowing full well that it lacked the required permit. For several years after its purchase, ANKA leased the property, and profited from the unpermitted activity. As an unpermitted adult residential facility, the site has had a documented history of complaints of code and other violations since 1989. The problems with the facility continued while it was being leased by ANKA. Despite these complaints -- including citations noting the unpermitted nature of the facility -- there has never been meaningful County action. Now ANKA comes with its application for a PUP for a very different use: a higher density commercial facility to house people who suffer from severe mental disorders, such as paranoid schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. And now ANKA -- and some of the county staff -- are suddenly making all sorts of representations about how responsible and responsive everyone will be to any problems and community concerns.

Our community has absolutely no confidence in any of these belated representations given our treatment by the county and by ANKA until Supervisor Benoit stepped in. Indeed, the fairest -- most accurate -- way to characterize the treatment to which the Sky Valley community has been subject is: CONTEMPT. Throughout the past several months, County staff has ignored us, publicly insulted us and tried to browbeat us into submission.

This site is not the only one on which an unpermitted facility has operated in Sky Valley. The community has complained about problems created by other unpermitted facilities and, as has been the case with this site, the County has consistently been unresponsive to community concerns. While we appreciate the efforts of Supervisor Benoit to understand the current situation, the residents of Sky Valley that I represent need to see concrete action on these unpermitted facilities beginning with the denial of this PUP.

The need for the Board of Supervisors to reestablish trust with our community is underscored by the treatment of Sky Valley in this case. To give you some examples:

First, the Planning Department staff report which was presented to the Planning Commission included a number of significant errors, including stating that the Community Council supported the PUP. When 2 members of the Council contacted Ken Baez, a Principal Planner for the County Planning Dept., to advise him of these concerns on separate occasions, each was called a "troublemaker" and no corrections were made. This demonstrated complete disrespect for our community's appointed representatives!

Another example: At one meeting of the Community Council, a resident inquired about whether any clients of the proposed facility would have a history of illegal drug use. The response to this question from County Department of Mental Health Desert Regional Director David Lundquist was to laugh derisively and say (and I quote): "You live in Sky Valley and you are concerned with drug addicts." Dr. Lundquist subsequently apologized for this insulting remark in a phone call and letter to members of the Council and asked to apologize to the community at large. At the following community meeting, no such apology was made.

Another example: At the final Council meeting, all commentators were opposed to the PUP and some 20 residents expressed a variety of concerns about the proposal. ANKA representatives responded to some of these concerns, but the primary advocate for ANKA's position was Leticia DeLara. Not only did she abandon her proper role as an unbiased county resource, but she did so by belittling and dismissing all concerns raised by community members as simply wrong.

The Sky Valley community is proud of its unique qualities as a rural desert community. As Supervisor Benoit's website states: <http://www.rivco4.org/web/communities/images/SkyValleyFull.jpg> "Residents of Sky Valley enjoy quiet, dark skies and visits from desert wildlife. Popular activities include hiking and horseback riding." We are not a community of drug users. Our appointed representatives are not "troublemakers." We are a community of concerned citizens who believe we have an important role in enforcing and protecting our community and respect for the law. We believe that we should be treated with respect. This has not been our experience with the county.

We ask that this proposal be denied and that the County make the effort to establish a trusting relationship with our community. The only way this can happen is for the County to demonstrate its willingness to respond in a meaningful way to the existing concerns that have gone unanswered in connection with the already existing, unpermitted uses.

Section 18.29 of Riverside County Ordinance 348 -- which sets forth the criteria for P UPs -- requires that "a public use permit shall not be granted unless the applicant demonstrates that the proposed use will not be detrimental to the health, safety or general welfare of the community."

This ordinance places the burden of proof on an applicant to "demonstrate" the proposed use will not be detrimental. This demonstration has not been made. It cannot be made. The proposal is for a relatively densely populated, commercial enterprise that is completely inconsistent with our community's rural nature, health and welfare. In addition, the proposal would place a very vulnerable population -- people suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and bipolar disorder -- in an area that has absolutely no infrastructure and is less than ½ mile from the wilderness area of Joshua Tree National Park. The only public service that is present is the fire department. All others -- Sheriff's Department, hospitals, ambulance services -- are far removed and, with the ongoing budget crises in California, they are becoming even more strained. The Sheriff's Department was very frank in advising that its service in the area has been cut back by 50%. Thus, should there be any serious problems, response times -- which have never been great in Sky Valley -- will be lengthened significantly. Placing a vulnerable population in such an isolated area is placing their health, safety and welfare in jeopardy and a further, very important reason, to deny the application.

Again we want to thank Supervisor Benoit for giving the Sky Valley community an opportunity to be heard. We also thank Mike Gialdini and Michelle DeAmond of the Supervisor's office who have been attentive and respectful in dealing with us. This is an important step in building community confidence that the County does respect and value it. Another -- and a critical further step -- will be denying this application for a Public Use Permit, and we respectfully request that you do so now.