The Inside Scoop



August, 2026

Dear District 3 Resident,

My name is Peter De Hoff, your City Council Representative for Poway's District 3. This monthly-ish newsletter is one way I keep you posted on what's happening in your city government.

There's a lot in this issue: the long road behind the Intracorp approval, a wonkier-than-usual look at how much say the Council really has under state housing law, where things stand on the state's new Zone 0 fire rules, and the Commons Phase 2 project headed your way next. And yes, a small favor at the bottom. Let's dig in.

Intracorp Moves Forward



Thank you to everyone who gave input and helped to mold the Intracorp project into one we can all be proud of. After more than 18 months of back-and-forth and multiple reviews, Intracorp put together a proposal that finally met the requirements and vision of the Poway Road Specific Plan (PRSP). For those new to this newsletter: the PRSP was approved in 2017 and was the result of years of work by a citizen-led ad hoc planning committee. This revitalization plan covers nearly the entire Poway Road corridor, removed roughly 800 units from the Poway General Plan for that region, increased setbacks in most cases and, as we learned in the most recent Council meeting, serves as our community's counter-proposal to the state's density bonus designs for Poway.

The initial version of this project would have required exceptions and changes to the PRSP. Exceptions to resident-led initiatives have long been a red line so, the proposal went back to the drawing board and to public review several times. What came out the other side of that process was a plan that met every specification of the PRSP: added more commercial space, shortened heights on the front buildings, and added more building articulation to break up the flat surfaces that gave some first-generation PRSP buildings that "boxed-in" feeling that some residents have flagged before.

At the end of all this, the project had been sent back so many times that Intracorp's legal team reminded everyone they could simply withdraw and use the state's Density Bonus framework instead; dropping the commercial space entirely and turning the site into a straight high-density housing project that removes local control. A project that the state mandates the City approve. (I did learn that Intracorp has used the Density Bonus framework on other projects, so they know the process well.) Fortunately, by the time we got that letter, the project was already fully PRSP-compliant, so there was no hard decision to make.

In the end, public support ran nearly two to one with six speakers in favor, three opposed, one neutral. More telling was that everyone who lived near the project, including those who lived directly behind it, spoke in favor of approval. Not just sending an email. Or writing their name on a slip of paper and handing it in. But showing up and speaking in person. And when we see and show that the process of public engagement, particularly with those who would be most impacted by a project, results in something even they can support, that counts in my book as a real win for the Pow-way. And it's a win that started with the pre-development conference, something unique to Poway, which is a first look at a project where the public can weigh in before any decision is made. A place where the lawyers haven't dug in their heels and real money isn't set to be lost when there is a course correction. Turnout was strong at Intracorp's pre-development conference, public engagement was strong at the ones that followed, and this project shows it — and is better for it.

Ask your Councilman: Understanding the Housing Accountability Act



A constituent recently wrote in with a thoughtful question that I think some of you have wondered about: When a project like Intracorp gets approved, how much of that is actually the Council's choice, and how much are the Council's hands being tied by state law? I thought the exchange was worth sharing in summary form, because it gets at something important about where local control begins and ends, and how it can sometimes get a bit fuzzy.

Could the Council simply vote "no" on a project that met all the requirements of the Poway Road Specific Plan (PRSP)?

In practice, no. Under the current version of the Housing Accountability Act (HAA), the only legal basis for denying a compliant housing project is for a specific health-and-safety finding, which is a bar that's next to impossible to meet. The HAA doesn't technically make it illegal to vote no on a compliant project, but it makes losing in a court challenge extremely likely and extremely expensive. The statute itself instructs courts to interpret the law in favor of housing approval, and California appellate courts have consistently sided with developers once a project is found to be objectively compliant.

So, a truly PRSP-compliant project that gets denied is very likely to win in a court challenge, at which point the city owes the developer's attorney's fees, which the state statute makes close to mandatory for the losing city to pay. And if the city still hasn't complied with the court's order for project approval within 60 days, the court must additionally impose a fine of a *minimum* of $10,000 per housing unit within the project. So, when I describe my vote as effectively "no choice," I mean it isn't a fiscally survivable choice — not that state law puts council members in handcuffs.

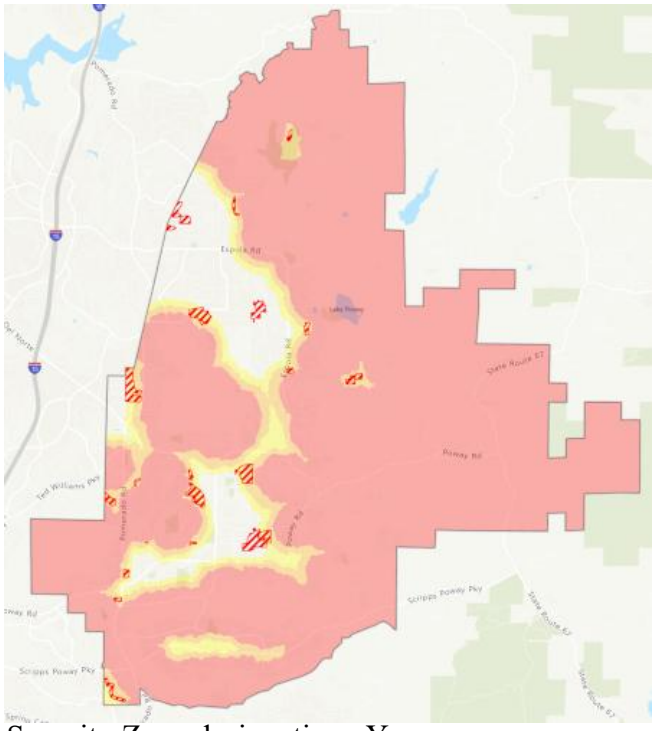
Could the Council require a smaller, shorter, or less dense project?

Not below the base caps already written into the PRSP — the Council cannot force reductions in unit count, height, or density below what the plan guarantees by right. Design is a different story, as well as a specific slice of height and density calculations: beyond those base caps, the PRSP allows additional height and density through incentives like lot consolidation or community benefits, but granting those bonuses is part of the negotiation process, not something a project is automatically entitled to. However, that flexibility is, in part, how the Intracorp project ended up with the highest degree of building articulation of any frontage in Poway, larger setbacks than required, and a reduction from three stories along the entire front, to two stories in places. That same type of negotiation process happened with Fairfield Phase II, which came down from four stories to three with the frontage pushed further back.

How is the HAA different from the State's Density Bonus program?

In a broad sense, the HAA is a "follow your own adopted rules, or face financial consequences" type of legislation. Once a project meets the objective standards already on the books, it removes the Council's discretion to deny or downsize it and the HAA enforces those rules to the letter. The state Density Bonus Law is similarly complex, but a different animal entirely: rather than enforcing local rules, it's a prescribed path for state-sanctioned circumvention of local control. A developer who sets aside affordable units on a sliding scale, starting around 5% very-low-income or 10% low-income units, earns a base density bonus starting around 20% above the otherwise-allowed density, climbing on a schedule up to a 50% increase. A 2024 change to the law allows developers who hit that top tier to stack a second bonus on top, which can push the total density increase close to 100% in some cases. At *any* qualifying tier, however, the project automatically receives waivers from local setback, height, and parking requirements. That's the path that, if Intracorp had walked away from PRSP compliance and resubmitted a new plan under the state density bonus program, could have turned that project into a straight high-density housing project with none of the commercial space or design negotiation that made the final, approved version work. One important function of the PRSP is to give Poway a compliant, community-shaped, locally controlled alternative to that state-mandated outcome.

Preparing for Zone 0



"Zone 0" is colloquial for California's proposed rules targeting the most vulnerable area around a home: the first five feet from your walls, decks, and fences. It grew out of the Los Angeles fires of January 2025, and the concept itself is simple: keep the ember-resistant zone right next to your house clear of anything that can catch a spark and carry the fire into your structure. What's less simple is exactly when and how it will be enforced, and I know that the uncertainty itself is stressful for a lot of you. My goal here isn't to give you firm answers I don't have yet, rather it's to keep you oriented as this moves forward.

The state missed its original December 31, 2025 deadline for finalizing these rules. A working draft from the state's "Zone 0" committee came out on April 17, 2026, and they have kept refining it through public workshops over the summer. These rules would apply to homes within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone designation. You can look up your own property to see in what zone it sits in Poway:

poway.org/1162/Fire-Hazard-Severity-Zones

On August 19th, the full state Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is scheduled to meet in Sacramento and *consider adopting* a final version of the rule. That's an important meeting, but it's a step in the process rather than a guaranteed finish line. The Board could adopt it, send it back for more revision, or something in between. If they do adopt it, existing homes would likely get a multi-year window to come into full compliance, but a handful of basic upkeep items look likely to apply right away, on the day the rule takes effect, rather than waiting for that phase-in period. Based on the current draft, those immediate items include things like: keeping roofs and rain gutters clear of leaves and debris, keeping tree branches at least ten feet from chimneys, removing dead or dying wood from trees near the house, and keeping live branches from hanging under eaves. Everything else, from clearing mulch and firewood from that five-foot zone, the fencing and shed requirements, and the "safety zone" immediately under eaves look to be on the longer, multi-year timeline.



New construction in high fire-risk areas already has to meet both the state's wildfire building code and Poway's own local fire code requirements, in place since January of this year. These updated Zone 0 rules would be an additional, more specific layer on top of that, once it takes effect.

Below is a link to the Board's meeting page, including how to watch remotely — note that remote viewing requires registration:

bof.fire.ca.gov/projects-and-programs/defensible-space-zones-0-1-and-2

There aren't a lot of hard, final answers yet — but when there are, the City will publish factual information, and I'll continue to share summaries and links here as things develop.

In the meantime, the Poway Neighborhood Emergency Corps (PNEC) – a terrific, all-volunteer resource run by Poway residents, for Poway residents – runs a home assessment survey program staffed by highly trained volunteers who can help you understand how your own property fits into these evolving state requirements. You can learn more and get in the queue for a survey list here:

POWAY NEIGHBORHOOD EMERGENCY CORPS

powaynec.com/firewise-communities

or by emailing powaynec@gmail.com.

Finally, the Poway Fire Department working to put together a big presentation on Wildfire Preparedness during an upcoming City Council meeting. Pay attention to the local news and I may send out a quick email blast when that date is finalized, so you don't miss it.

Separately, but not unrelated: insurers across California have been pulling back coverage and raising premiums in high fire-risk areas over the past couple of years, and that broader insurance crunch is a central issue in this November's open race for California Insurance Commissioner.

https://ballotpedia.org/California_Insurance_Commissioner_election,_2026

And

https://calmatters.org/california-voter-guide-2026/insurance-commissioner/

Whoever wins will have real influence over how affordable and available home insurance stays for communities like ours so this one may be worth keeping an eye on alongside everything happening with Zone 0.



Meridian Rises Again

From the builders behind the Apollo (across from Taco Bell) and Poway Commons (next to El Armando's) comes the next chapter: Poway Commons Part 2, from Meridian Development. If my crystal ball is any good, this looks like the last major project on Poway Road for quite some time, possibly years.

The project consolidates three parcels, the current Enterprise Rental Car site (they're relocating westward) and two adjacent vacant lots on either side, into a single 2.73-acre development: 42 three-story townhomes, plus roughly 7,468 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 1,000 square feet of office along Poway Road.

Here's what makes this moment matter: As of right now, nothing has been formally decided or even formally submitted. No application, no environmental review, no entitlement request. No lawyers are digging in their feet. Major money hasn't been spent. The Council itself won't be voting on anything at this meeting, only giving input and direction on a concept. That's the same Pre-Development Conference process that shaped Intracorp into what it became, and it's happening again here. The one point in the process where you aren't reacting to a plan, you're *helping to shape* one before it exists.

Mark your calendar: Tuesday, 8/18, 7 PM at City Hall (Item 8 on the agenda – poway.org/Calendar.aspx?EID=4944).

Don't get hung up on the fact that the early concept doesn't yet meet every standard in the plan, as that gets worked out as the process moves forward. Your input carries real weight on open questions such as: Does this concept earn the height and design flexibility it's asking for? What would make this feel like more like a real "Town Center" to you – a place people choose to spend time, not just pass through? What kinds of businesses would make this stretch of Poway Road somewhere you'd actually want to go? How can the design be changed to bring more vibrancy?

Given that this may be the last shot at shaping Poway Road for a generation, show up if you possibly can – or send written comments if you can't. This is how a good project becomes a great one, and right now, you're the one holding the pen.

Election Season Is Upon Us Again



Many thanks to everyone who offered to sign, and did sign, my nomination papers. There were more offers of help than there were spaces on the page, and it was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with so many of you along the way. That part of the process is now behind us, and I'm grateful to everyone who made time for it.

Now, the real work of campaigning begins. For a little refresher, here's a bit more about who I am and what I'm running on:

District 3. 51 years old. 17 years as a Poway resident.

Occupation: By day, I'm a molecular biology scientist at UC San Diego, where I split my time managing a program developing biomarkers for early detection of pregnancy disorders and a CDC-funded program focused on respiratory disease testing. Evenings and weekends and lunch breaks and during some PTO, I serve as your District 3 City Council Representative.

Why I'm running: In 2022, I ran on a commitment to public safety, fiscal discipline, and quality infrastructure – and that commitment has delivered a real track record: Poway continues to be recognized as the Safest City in San Diego County, we've run balanced budgets every year with no cuts to services, our roads are the envy of the county, water projects have come in – on time and on budget – and we've all seen firsthand the upgrades at our parks and at the Poway Center for the Performing Arts. I'm honored to again be endorsed by the Deputy Sheriffs' Association and the Poway Firefighters Association for that focus on safety. I'm running in 2026 to build on this record, not just preserve it; including expanding the open space protections we've already secured, to further safeguard Poway's hillsides, ridgelines, and rural character for the long term.

Relevant experience: I helped lead the acquisition of more than 300 acres of open space to conserve our hillsides and ridgelines, I initiated the hillside Dark Sky Ordinance to protect our night skies and rural landscape, and I initiated the Pickleball Noise Ordinance to properly mitigate noise. Through my monthly e-newsletter, *The Inside Scoop* – the one you're reading right now – I've expanded outreach and invited resident input on development projects, so more voices get heard in a meaningful way. Because a good development needs to be more than just compliant with the zoning code: it takes real community input to make sure a project fits the character of the neighborhood, gets ahead of traffic and infrastructure impacts, and reflects what the people who actually live there want.

How I'd continue to serve: By staying focused on what's worked – safety, infrastructure, fiscal discipline, and community investment – while expanding our open space protections and keeping the lines of communication with residents open and responsive.

Personal Detail: My daughter continues her journey through middle school, and she reminds me daily why keeping Poway a great place to raise a family matters so much to me.

If four years of steady, proven leadership are what you want more of, this campaign season I'm asking for two things: your vote in November, and if you're able, a donation today. Every yard sign, walk piece, and mailer that reaches your neighbors' doors depends on people like you stepping up.

Can I count on you?

DONATE

https://www.efundraisingconnections.com/c/DeHoffforPowayCityCouncil

There are other ways to help, too: if you'd be willing to host a yard sign, just let me know. Visible signs around the neighborhood genuinely help. And if you, or a handful of your neighbors, would ever like to sit down, ask questions, or just hear more about what I'm working on, I'd love to stop by. Reach out and we'll find a time. Either way – thank you for reading, for caring about this city, and for being the reason Poway stays Poway.

Your Feedback Matters

I want to hear from you about what interests you most to see in future newsletters.
Your input will help shape future updates.

Thank you for taking the time to stay informed and engaged. Together, we can continue making Poway a great place to live.

Sincerely,

Peter De Hoff
Poway District 3 City Council Representative

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Question or concern regarding governance issues in Poway? Email me at pdehoff@poway.org
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Paid for by De Hoff for Poway City Council District 3, 2026
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