

opinion

If it matters to you, it matters to us

letters@ojaivalleynews.com

Editorial

Co-opting the climate flag

Laura Rearwin Ward, publisher

Wapping oneself in the flag, swelled with righteous morality — with a strong connection to a voter base who fear both change and outsiders, armed with a band of speechwriters and trusty social media warriors at the ready — has proved a winning campaign strategy.

It worked in our national election in 2016. And it was successful in Ojai in 2020. And if it's not broken, why fix it for 2022?

The flags have changed, but the tactics remain the same. The "Make Ojai Great Again" crowd has joined with a local environmental action group and put forward a slate of candidates. Their tactic is to seize the title of "Climate Candidate." All others are "climate delayers" or simply not in the club with the most righteous of all.

A local citizen action group, formerly an Ojai City Council ad hoc committee, became a private group when it was forced to choose to comply with the transparency of open-meeting laws (Ralph M. Brown Act) or dissolve as a city committee. The group of five chose dissolution, added three more members and became a private citizens' group. The group continues to use the name it used as a city-created committee, "Climate Emergency Mobilization Committee."

The committee, turned citizen advocacy group, has publicly been focused, for more than four years on one item — the electrification of Ojai city through a California reach code (a building code that reaches beyond the state codes). However, according to Assemblymember Steve Bennett, the state of California has an electrical grid struggling to grow and keep up as it transitions toward its current climate-mitigation goals.

In his speech to the Ojai Valley Democratic Club, Mr. Bennett said that reaching climate goals will require years of continued reliance on natural gas and nuclear power. The group's achievement, to date, has been to assist the city in the adoption of its current electric reach code (with carve-outs) on new business and housing construction, the effect of which, over the past 15 years, may have impacted up to 12 houses. It is a contribution to our environment that is considered largely symbolic, even by some committee members.

The original ad hoc city committee was tasked with bringing suggestions forward to help the city mitigate climate change. It was not involved with

the solar project recently completed by the city of Ojai, or with any of a dozen climate-mitigation solutions they might have taken on — including grant writing, education, local ordinances related to waste, conservation, domestic burning ... too many opportunities to mention. Committee members' interest has remained with building code restrictions. Today, the committee remains in a dogged pursuit to eliminate the hardship exemptions to the reach building codes. The candidates the committee endorses have pledged to assist in that effort. The exemptions include hardship, commercial kitchens, ADU construction and affordable-housing construction.

The elimination of the exemptions for affordable-housing construction is a way to stop affordable housing from being built because of the added expense to construct it. Darcy Taylor, CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Ventura County, came to Ojai City Council in April and doubted that it would be financially feasible to build affordable, all electric housing at this time ... even a project that is subsidized by the city.

Meanwhile, the Sierra Club has joined other environmental groups in the state's call advocating for housing infill to be built to mitigate the carbon emissions from commuter travel.

The slate of candidates this private citizen group has put forward as "climate candidates" have little to show in the area of climate-mitigation policy or activism.

The regressive arguments against housing are seductive. However the consequences of following the NIMBY agenda are a failing school district, increasing commuter traffic, and a segregated community of haves and have-nots.

No one running for office should fly the "committed climate" flag higher than the next. The metaphorical flag doesn't belong to any candidate or group to the exclusion of others. That flag belongs to us — the residents of Ojai, regardless of how long they've lived here. It has not been earned by anyone on the ballot.

Ojai waves the flag of climate concern together, but dividers would separate us, just as groups nationally have divided the country over the flag of the United States. The U.S. flag is for all of us. There are no "real" Americans and there are no "real" Ojaians. We are all the lucky visitors walking this Earth and the trails of the Ojai Valley.

Sadly, Ojai has become a microcosm of the country, even while we had hoped we were beyond it.

Guest Column



Photo submitted

From left are Eric Schleelein of San Francisco, a supporter of the T-shirt fundraiser for Ukrainian children; Consul General of Ukraine in San Francisco Dmytro Kushneruk; Mike Donohue of Ojai; and Consulate employee Mykola Podhorneyi, at the Consulate General of Ukraine in San Francisco on Oct. 3.

College students help children in Ukraine with T-shirt message

By Mike Donohue and Team Russia Leave Ukraine - Ojai

We applaud the efforts of the highly rated and respected international charity, Save The Children — Ukrainesavethechildren.org.

Save The Children is helping Ukrainian children and families focusing on health, safety and education. And "hats off" to the local effort, spearheaded by young Ojai residents and others helping Ukrainian children.

The Southern California citizens and a small group of committed college students in California are raising money for Ukrainian children through the sale of T-shirts. The shirts have a simple, yet direct five-word message: "Russia Go Home — Leave Ukraine."

These words are also translated into Russian to send the clear message. All proceeds from sales and donations go to the Save The Children-Ukraine campaign. Save The Children was founded more than 100 years ago in Fairfield, Connecticut.

The students and a small team of helpers are beginning to sell the shirts through the following website: russialeaveukraine.com.

So much help is needed during this horrific humanitarian catastrophe affecting millions of Ukrainians.

Recently, the team met with members of the Ukrainian Consulate in San Francisco and received sincere support and recognition of their efforts.

The Ukrainian regions of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk regions are legitimately Ukraine, as is Crimea. The recent sham "referendum" (basically at gunpoint) to transfer the lands to Russia has no legal standing.

More than 100 countries agree. A country's borders cannot be changed by "representatives" with no legal standing.

Plain and simple, Russia or so-called Ukrainian representatives (puppets of the Russian regime) are not authorized or legally entitled to transfer Ukrainian land to another person, entity or government.

The four Ukrainian "government representatives" of the sovereign territories in Ukraine's east and south cannot legally transfer ownership or change Ukraine's sovereign borders.

Their signatures are invalid, as is the contract or so-called "treaty." The laws and constitution are clear in Ukraine: This action is unlawful, impermissible, unrecognizable. A country's borders cannot be changed by "representatives" who have no legal standing.

I salute the young Americans and people all over the world who are taking a stand for "Russia Go Home — Leave Ukraine."

Support Becker Group housing agreement

Folks who oppose the Cottages' development agreement have consistently opposed any new affordable housing in Ojai, citing the climate crisis, environmental risks and threats to our quality of life. They also claim that we cannot build a single new housing unit and somehow keep housing affordable. That is clearly magical thinking that defies the laws of housing supply and demand.

But these local anti-housing activists are completely at odds on these issues with major environ-

Council.

But the benefits of infill housing will be even more substantial in Ojai.

Twenty-five years of saying no to housing has caused a dramatic decline in public school enrollment, resulting in a serious crisis in student performance, teacher pay and the budget, putting it at risk of losing its independent status.

Moreover, the largest release of greenhouse gases in the valley is caused by the 86% of our workforce who commute daily because

change, protect our environment, save our public school and improve the quality of life of those who work and live here, the most effective policy we can implement is low-impact infill housing.

Please adopt the proposed Development Agreement. It's a start on two of our greatest problems: affordable housing and climate change.

— Jeffrey Starkweather — Meiners Oaks (The writer is an Ojai Planning



Ojai Valley News photo by Kimberly Rivers

Removal of two trees began on Oct. 10 in Meiners Oaks and by Oct. 12 most of the limbs and foliage had been removed.

Heritage oaks deserve better protection

By Caryn Bosson

Anyone familiar with Ojai over the years knows that besides the special beauty of our mountains and sunlight, we've been graced by numerous, towering heritage oak trees. Sadly, many of these centuries-old guardians have been lost — think back to the giants that once sheltered Bart's Books, Matilija Street between Signal and Montgomery, at the Park & Ride, and many more places.

Each one of those trees was invaluable. That's why the recent approval to cut down two heritage oaks in Meiners Oaks last week based on one arborist's recommendation ("County permit is 'kiss of death' for two oak trees") is of concern.

Local arborist and certified court expert, Mark Crane, was quoted giving them the value of \$100,000 a tree.

That sounds like a lot until we consider what these ancient oak trees provide: beauty and a sense of place, of course, but also dramatically more carbon absorption than younger trees, and dramatically more habitat for our native insects, birds and mammals than other tree species.

Their massive canopies respire water into the atmosphere, creating more moisture, and they catch

the rain in their deep root structure allowing the water to infiltrate the soil, ensuring more ground water and protecting against flooding.

Although we at Ojai Trees plant more than 100 trees a year with community volunteers, this does not make up for the loss of our guardian heritage oaks.

These precious trees must be cared for by certified arborists, and we believe that in many cases the opinion of only one arborist should not determine whether a tree should be cut down. In fact, we strongly advocate for a second opinion from an independent arborist before this drastic step is taken.

Certainly it's a lot to ask of property owners, but when you own a heritage oak you become a steward of an irreplaceable natural resource on behalf of the whole community. It's worth the extra investment in expert care and assessment.

If you care about trees, we invite you to join us in our four annual tree-planting events.

The next one is Nov. 12. More information is at ojaitrees.org

— Caryn Bosson is a Board Member of Ojai Trees, submitted on behalf of Ojai Trees.

mental groups such as the Sierra Club, the Greenbelt Alliance and key climate action groups such as the Cool Climate Network, as even AOC and Democratic Socialist or Berniecrats.

The Cool Climate Network found that urban infill holds the greatest opportunity to reduce greenhouses gases — making low-impact, infill housing "the lowest hanging fruit with the highest return."

The Sierra Club defined infill as "the development of new homes, jobs, and services in existing urban and suburban communities and small towns. By enabling people to live closer to jobs and services, infill development reduces driving and greenhouse gas emissions while providing other quality of life and economic benefits."

The University of California at Berkeley found that if California is going to meet its new, steep emission standards, one of the most effective strategies will be to promote infill housing.

State Sen. and Democratic Socialist Jabari Brisport wrote: "The construction of market rate housing does not raise nearby rents" after reading a research paper on housing supply. I provided this research to the mayor and City

they cannot afford to live here. So if we want to address climate

commissioner, but is writing as an individual.)

CORRECTION

In the Broken Promises ad paid for by the Ojai Valley Democratic Club that appeared on page C2 of the October 14 issue of the Ojai Valley News, it was stated that Mayor Betsy Stix voted No on funding for the Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Ojai Valley Family Shelter, the Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council, O-Higher Ed and Girls Empowerment Workshop.

Those No votes by Mayor Stix were contained in the officially approved minutes of the August 23 city council meeting. At both the September 13 and 27 meetings of the city council, the Mayor voted to approve those minutes. Among her official duties as Mayor, Stix has an obligation to read and review the minutes of prior meetings and seek a correction when she discovers the minutes are inaccurate.

After the Ojai Valley Democratic Club had completed its Broken Promises ad, the city council met on October 11 and approved a second correction to the August 23 minutes as part of their consent agenda. This third approved version of the minutes now indicates that Mayor Stix voted in the affirmative to provide funding for O-Higher Ed and Girls Empowerment Workshop.

The Ojai Valley Democratic Club did not learn about this third approved version of the August 23 minutes until Monday, October 17 when contacted by a representative of O-Higher Ed. A review of the meeting video, which the Town Clerk relies on to confirm the accuracy of council votes, showed Mayor Stix voted for funding O-High Ed and Girls Empowerment Workshop.

Paid for the Ojai Valley Democratic Club