

September 13, 2023

Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District Board

I will not be available to attend the PAWSD Board meeting in person tomorrow, and I don't know if it's your practice to take public comment from people who attend by Zoom. Anticipating you do not invite public comment by Zoom, I am writing about the Running Iron Ranch agenda item (page 147 of the meeting packet).

As some of you may recall, I am a member of the Board of Directors of the San Juan Water Conservancy District. I share this detail in the interest of transparency and to make clear that the views I express in these comments are my own. I am not writing to express the views of the SJWCD or any other individual SJWCD board member.

Early in the year, I visited the 20-acre river access parcel with representatives of the business community, County, and other SJWCD board members. That visit provided context for a request that PAWSD and SJWCD work together to make river access available there for the benefit of outfitters and the public. The County was willing to lease the property to facilitate public access. The County prepared a lease that reflected responsibilities identified by PAWSD staff and by others during the site visit.

The PAWSD Board, pressed with other matters, could not make time to consider the proposed lease or hold a joint work session with the SJWCD to discuss the lease or a path forward. The community lost the value of access for another year.

Now, instead of working with the County, local business, and the SJWCD board, PAWSD unilaterally notified the County Administrator (according to his report to the Commissioners at their work session Tuesday) that a deal for public access is off the table. PAWSD now plans to turn the land into a recreation facility for PAWSD employees.

PAWSD had no time to look at a short lease that would enable broader community access, but it has time to develop a park for the exclusive use of its employees? Really? How does that plan deliver value to the community?

If the County is still willing to move forward, PAWSD should take the time needed to work with the County and SJWCD, co-owner of the land, to finish the lease this fall so that improvements to enable public access can be planned and completed for next year.

PAWSD also wants to develop housing across the road on a different part of the Running Iron Ranch. I appreciate that workforce housing is a challenge for the community and that members of the PAWSD board would like to support their employees. More workforce housing is a laudable goal.

But should PAWSD be in the business of developing and administering workforce housing? With so many projects on its plate that the PAWSD board couldn't finish one lease with the County, how does it expect to become a residential landlord?

More significantly, the Rules and Regulations of PAWSD establish its purpose, which is "to provide for the control, management, and operation of the water and wastewater systems of the District, including additions, extensions, and connections thereto, and to provide for the administration and enforcement of such standards." It is not the purpose of PAWSD to develop or administer housing, and PAWSD's

management and operations are not designed for PAWSD to act as a housing developer or residential landlord.

I know that some members of the PAWSD board chafe at the history of the Running Iron Ranch, the purpose for which it was acquired, and any plans to advance the objective of additional water storage. Like it or not, PAWSD's interests in the Running Iron Ranch are bound up with the interests of SJWCD and the community in the bigger picture of water in this area. Making end-runs around other stakeholders to construct housing there will not serve the public in the long run.

As a PAWSD customer, I encourage the board not to push PAWSD into a line of business outside PAWSD's public purpose – water and wastewater -- and beyond its experience and operations.

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