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PALOS VERDES PENINSULA

2016: Year in Review

From coyotes to surfers to social media, plenty happened on the Peninsula

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From a couple of lawsuits filed against a group of territorial surfers to a beloved whale making a return to her historic home, the Peninsula has seen its share of news in 2016.

A Palos Verdes Estates Planning Commissioner had his plans for a home remodel struck down amid opposition from nearby neighbors, and in Rancho Palos Verdes, a homeowner's plans to develop a canyon sparked outrage from nearby residents worried about the safety of their properties.

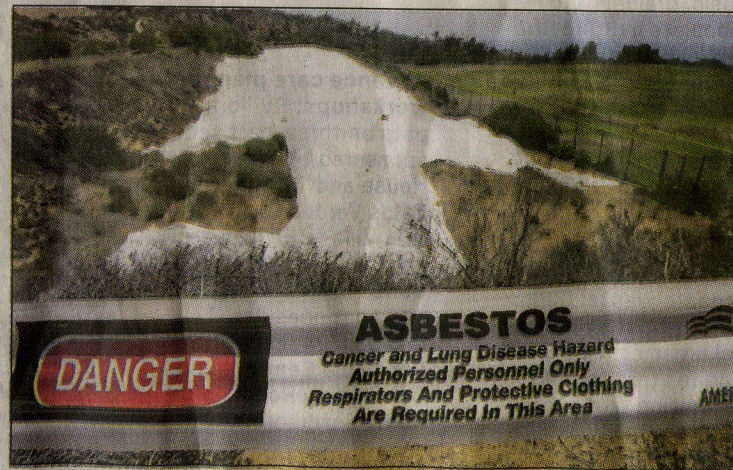
The Palos Verdes Peninsula School District continues its back-

and-forth with a group of local activists who have accused officials of violating an open meetings law, something the district vehemently denies.

And the Rolling Hills Country Club's renovation project inched toward completion while residents from around the South Bay and as far away as Japan have already snapped up memberships ahead of its 2017 opening date.

Social media continued to be a thorn in the side of many Peninsula residents and cities, as Facebook posts and Instagram photos draw ever-larger crowds to the scenic outdoor areas, and lead to complaints of trash, too-busy roadways and belligerent visitors.

Some of the other top stories of 2016 include:



FILE PHOTO BY ED CRISOSTOMO/SCNG

Plastic tarps cover an area where asbestos warning tape and signs are posted by the upper Ladera Linda fields in August.

School district cancels solar panels project

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District nixed a

project in June that would have installed solar panels at 16 school campuses.

The cancellation came after ve-

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hement community opposition to the plans, although district officials said that had no impact on their decision to forgo the panels.

The no-bid contract with PFMG Solar for the panels was approved in 2015, and sparked the community backlash from residents who opposed the project for aesthetic reasons, the proposed placement of panels at some campuses as well as other reasons.

Ultimately, the district decided to cancel the contract with PFMG, citing a reduction in electrical rates by Southern California Edison which, made the project not financially viable, district officials said.

Wireless towers restricted

In late April, Rancho Palos Verdes residents who had pushed for a comprehensive ordinance to regulate the approval and installation of cell towers saw their efforts come to fruition when the City Council approved a law limiting where wireless companies can place their towers.

The same law also puts limits on the aesthetics of the towers, after similar requirements were passed by Palos Verdes Estates in 2001 and updated in 2012 after a lawsuit against that city by Sprint.

Rancho Palos Verdes resident Jeff Calvagna found that Crown Castle, a telecommunications service provider, had used photos and plans that underplayed the size of the towers they were installing in city rights of way. Crown Castle criticized the ordinance as overly restrictive, and ultimately sent a letter to Rancho Palos Verdes threatening legal action.

ALPR Cameras approved and installed

In response to a spike in the number of residential burglaries in 2015, all four

Peninsula cities approved the installation of a total of 45 Automated License Plate Recognition cameras throughout the area.

The entire system cost about \$715,600 and included cameras at most major entries onto the Peninsula. Each city contributed an amount based on the number of residential units in the city. Rancho Palos Verdes footed the highest bill, at \$432,275, followed by Palos Verdes Estates, which paid \$154,047 toward the program. Rolling Hills Estates contributed \$80,000 to the system and Rolling Hills paid \$44,000 for three cameras in that city.

The majority of the cameras were in place by August, and had already led to more than a dozen arrests by early December, and even helped bring down a

shoplifting ring that stole nearly \$100,000 in beauty products from around Southern California, officials said.

At its final meeting of the year, the Rancho Palos Verdes City Council approved a plan to add 24 more cameras on the city's eastern edge along Western Boulevard.

Short-term rentals banned

Home rentals from websites like AirBnB and VRBO became illegal in all four Peninsula cities this year, most recently in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Residents opposed to the rentals complained of strangers coming and going along their streets, and relayed stories of renters using homes for raucous parties that go well into the

early hours of the morning.

Homeowners renting out their rooms characterized the rentals as needed income, and many said the ban punishes problematic rental operators at the expense of responsible homeowners.

Palos Verdes Estates banned the rentals in May after the City Council approved a recommendation by the city's Planning Com-

mission.

Rolling Hills Estates followed suit later in the year, adopting a city-wide ban on the rentals in October.

More recently, Rancho Palos Verdes approved an all-out ban in September, overturning a Planning Commission recommendation to allow some of the rentals as long as only one room was rented and the homeowner remained on-

site. Earlier this month, the council also approved a ban on advertising, a step meant to help enforce the larger ban on the rentals.

Enforcement of similar bans around the South Bay has been an issue for other cities, as rental owners use loopholes to continue renting rooms and homes while evading city officials' notice.

said the man holding a surfboard. "You can't tell me where I can't surf."

The Daily Breeze obtained a copy of the report through a Public Records Act request for all police

localism.

According to the supplemental report, the man who punched the surfer told an investigator that the surfer had been spreading rumors about him and,

legedly included comments about the aggressor's wife. It was then that the altercation broke out and the other man punched him, the victim said.

Citing pending litiga-

Varying versions of events have stalled criminal investigations over the years at Lunada Bay, according to a review of public records by the Daily Breeze.

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Bicycle signs spark controversy

In Palos Verdes Estates a debate over cycling safety signs has led to flared tempers online and at multiple public meetings.

In July, the City Council approved one set of signs that read "3 Feet It's the Law," which have been installed along city streets. The council shot down a proposal to add five signs that read "Bicycles May Use Full Lane," which has sparked protests by cyclists who say those signs would improve safety for riders around the Peninsula. Most recently cyclists staged a "die in" protest this month to continue their push for the signs. Residents opposed to the signs accuse cyclists of failing to adhere to existing road laws, and say the signs would only lead to more egregious flouting of roadway laws.

Three cyclists have been killed on the Peninsula in 2016, two of whom died after being struck by cars in Palos Verdes Estates. Of those three, however, police determined that two accidents were the cyclist's fault and the third is still under review.

City officials have said repeatedly that they will wait to make a decision on

the signs until a Peninsula-wide Roadway Safety Master Plan approved in October can be finished.

Coyote management

After five coyotes were shot and killed on the Peninsula in May, residents have continued to report coyote sightings in residential neighborhoods.

The five killed in May were all deemed to be a threat to humans by county Department of Agriculture officials. Residents raised concerns that most of the animals were shot while they were outside of a trap, which could have led to a stray bullet hitting a person or pet. Officials, however, said the county employees are trained to know when and how to use their weapons, and wouldn't shoot them in an area that could pose a risk to anyone.

Now all four cities on the Peninsula are planning to take part in a Wildlife Watch pilot program in 2017, which aims to teach residents to work together to keep coyotes out of their neighborhoods. City officials have compared the program to existing Neighborhood Watch efforts and say it will improve education for residents, something homeowners have complained is lacking.

Bay Boys slapped with class-action suits

A decades-old group of territorial surfers who have claimed Lunada Bay as their turf were hit with two class-action lawsuits alleging the group is a criminal gang.

The suits accuse the Bay Boys of using violence and threats to keep outsiders away from their surf spot, at times slashing tires, throwing rocks and making threats toward other surfers in the water.

The same suits allege

Palos Verdes Estates has turned a blind eye to the group and their behavior toward outsiders who want to surf the bay's prime waves.

The California Coastal Commission weighed in on the Bay Boys, pushing for public amenities along the clifftops above the bay. The agency also called on the city to tear down a long-standing patio built on the water's edge that had been expanded over the years. While workers tore down the patio in early December, vandals set fire to demolition equipment and tampered with the contractor's vehicles.

Now Palos Verdes Estates is in the process of contracting with park rangers from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to make extra patrols around the bay, and city officials are looking to install surveillance cameras on the shoreline and bluffs above the bay.

State agencies probe Ladera Linda soil

Soil imported near the fields at Ladera Linda park in 2015 was the object of a multi-agency investigation launched in April.

The investigation, headed by the state Department of Toxic Substance Control, aimed to determine whether the soil had been tainted with asbestos and other contaminants before it was trucked into the area above a nearby set of soccer fields.

Investigators took samples in May, and the area where the dirt is stored has been fenced off since August.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, which owns the land where the dirt is stored, and the Palos Verdes chapter of the American Youth Soccer Organization, which manages the fields, both contend the soil has been tested and

that results say the dirt is not tainted.

Nearby residents, however, have long criticized the district and AYSO for a lack of transparency and contend that the soil has not been properly tested and that some results show trace amounts of asbestos and other contaminants.

In October, the school district, soccer organization and DTSC entered into a consent agreement, which lays the groundwork for what the PVPUSD and AYSO need to do to bring the department's investigation to a close. In November, the DTSC determined that more investigation is necessary before the inquiry can come to a close.

Association faces contested elections

After the Palos Verdes Homes Association's issue-ridden 2016 election ended without a quorum, an opposition group — Residents for Open Board Elections — called into question the association's methods for counting votes.

This year, ROBE, which was formed out of members' opposition to a 2012 transfer of land to a Palos Verdes Estates couple, met the PVHA deadline to have its candidates listed on the official ballot.

Ballots were distributed for the upcoming Jan. 10 election in November, but an error at the post office led to an incorrect address being printed on the return envelope. The address, which is for a pet grooming business down the street from the accounting firm hired to tabulate the votes, won't have an impact on the election though, association officials said.

Historically, contested elections have been rare for the PVHA board of directors.