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Compiled by the County Administrative Office,
County of San Bernardino, California

The following contains news media accounts referencing the County of San Bernardino and other items concerning issues of importance or interest to the county. Items that may be unflattering to the county or even untrue are included to make the organization aware of what the public is seeing.
NO DEAL

Public shut out of settlement

OUR VIEW: Taxpayers group has a right to be angry, but that may be as far as it gets.

A group that is contesting San Bernardino County’s $102 million settlement with the Colonies Partners LP may not get anywhere in asking the Board of Supervisors to rescind the outlandish giveaway, but it is making a very valid point.

The San Bernardino County Taxpayers for a Fair Resolution has accused supervisors of acting in secret when they suddenly agreed to make the cash offer without giving the public time to comment. And it wants the settlement revoked.

It’s a deal that never should have been shoved under the taxpayer’s nose without the taxpayer first being allowed to weigh in on it, since it cost so much dough. And it threatens to wipe out the possibility of any future flood-control projects, since the costs of the settlement will be borne entirely by the county’s Flood Control District.

The board was all ready at its Nov. 28 meeting to consider a settlement that would have included surplus county land, along with a whole lot of cash, to make the settlement. Instead, almost out of the blue, the board announced that it had OK’d the deal all in cash — with $22 million wired immediately to the developer’s account and another $80 million on the way, either in installments or through a bond yet to be issued.

Getting the board to renege on the deal may be all a moot point based on those grounds, despite state law that requires government agencies to allow the public to comment on agenda items before they take action.

A clause in the Ralph M. Brown Act states that even if a violation of the public-meetings law occurred, a court cannot rescind a legislative body’s actions if it were to hurt a third party — the Colonies, in this case.

Which, of course, would probably suit the board just fine, since it got itself into this mess. It certainly didn’t want the public’s advice — let alone that of the attorneys it shoved out of the room.

As Terry Francke, California Aware’s general counsel, put it, if a government body decides a settlement looks attractive, “They want it to be a done deal by the time the public finds out.”

But taxpayers should make sure it’s going to cost supervisors as much as it’s going to cost taxpayers. It’s a heck of a lot of money, after all, and none of it is going to benefit left-out taxpayers.