

Jacob warns of dangers with casino



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By [Karen Pearlman \(/staff/karen-pearlman/\)](#) | 4:01 p.m. Aug. 19, 2016



Residents of Jamul, Spring Valley and Deerhorn Valley are unhappy about the Hollywood Casino opening up in the rural town of Jamul, the Hollywood Casino is still facing some concerns from the local community.
Karen Pearlman

JAMUL — Apparently almost ready to open in the rural town of Jamul, the Hollywood Casino is still facing some concerns from the local community.

Residents say they are mostly concerned about increased traffic along the unlit, winding two-lane state Route 94 that runs past the casino.

County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, always outspoken regarding the \$360 million casino and a Jamul resident held a community conference at a private home Friday to address concerns.

The casino is owned by the Jamul Indian Village, a 54-member tribe of Kumeyaay Indians who call a six-acre parcel on State Route 94 home.

There has been no official opening date set for the casino, tribal Chairwoman Erica Pinto said. But the tribe has been promoting the casino on television and billboards around the county, and construction appears complete.

More than 70 residents from Jamul, Spring Valley and Deerhorn Valley showed up at the news conference with signs that read “Jamul to Hollywood: ‘No Dice,’ ” “People Matter - Not Greed ... Safety First!” and “Welcome to Death Alley.”

Jacob called Route 94 a “deathtrap” and said that since 2005, there have been 1,150 collisions on the road leading to Jamul. She said “hundreds (have been) injured and 23 to date have been killed.” She said that since 2010, 10 collisions have occurred along the stretch of the highway near the casino.

An estimated 17,000 cars and trucks daily make the commute on the highway starting near Steele Canyon Road at the Mexican border. At least 9,000 more trips are projected to be taken on the road when the casino opens, Jacob said.

Jacob referred to the casino as “the Hollywood Horror Show,” and with the casino and the highway as a backdoor to a disaster in the making.

The Board of Supervisors in April, with Jacob dissenting, approved a formal agreement between the county and the tribal Village. Although the casino is on tribal land, some of the access to the reservation and most of the property is owned by the county, with Caltrans governing the highway.

“State officials are failing to do their most important job, to protect the public safety,” Jacob said. “Caltrans is open without all the needed traffic safety improvements in place, including new turn lanes, retaining walls at highway intersections, including the fire station.”

As she has in the past, Pinto said public safety is the tribe’s main concern and that it is dedicated to being a responsible neighbor.

She said the tribe has committed nearly \$20 million toward roadway improvements identified by Caltrans and the tribe’s own roadway improvements identified in its Memorandum of Understanding with the county.

Jacob said those improvements have not fully been done, although Caltrans has put in a traffic signal at the entrance, about a block from the fire station.

Caltrans spokesman Ed Cartagena said the agency will continue to review the improvements proposed by the tribe.

Earlier this month, the casino was granted an interim operating permit to serve alcohol, adding to worries about a required public hearing between the community and the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control about a license. The hearing at the casino has not happened yet.

Other casinos have waited more than a decade to gain a liquor license. Barona Casino opened in 1994 and secured its license in 2007; Sycuan opened in 1993 and secured its license in 2009.

Other speakers at the press conference were former County Sheriff’s Deputy Commander Glenn Revell, Steele Canyon Principal Don Hohimer and Jamul Community Church Senior Pastor Gary Musser.

Revell, president of the Jamul Action Committee, spoke about the dangers posed by the casino and the long-term impact over the project.

Hohimer said the risks are high for the school’s 2,000 students and nearly 200 employees with the addition of a casino and alcohol at the casino.

Musser talked about a half-dozen memorials he had officiated for people who died in accidents along the freeway. “Too many of these stories,” Musser said. “Too many stories of death on Highway 94. And now we’re going to add alcohol in addition to that mix? Who in their right minds thinks that that is OK?”

He said he had no issue with the tribal members, but that “this casino just doesn’t belong here.”

Hollywood Casino is expected to include a gaming and entertainment facility of 200,000 square feet, with more than 1,000 jobs.

machines, nearly 50 live table games, restaurants, bars, lounges and an enclosed multistory underground parking garage with almost 1,900 spaces.

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