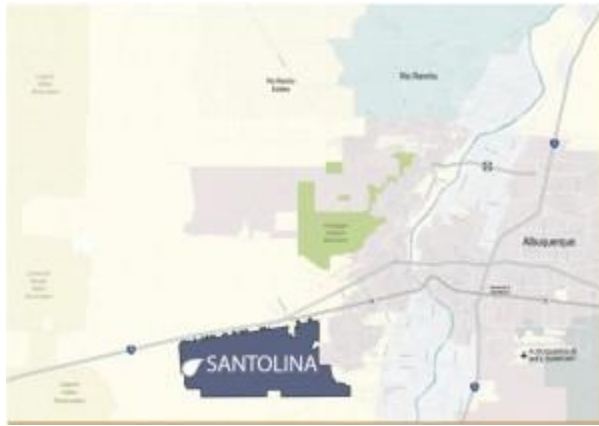


Proposed Santolina Development Threatens South Valley Acequias

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South Valley Acequias

By Jorge Garcia, Mayordomo Armijo Acequia Association, Chiknauí Tekpatl Ome Tochtli

Do we have enough water in the Central Valley of Albuquerque for a 38,000 housing development? On May 26th the newspaper La Jornada of Mexico published an article (see <http://bit.ly/1mnW2KU>) about a water transfer in the Mexican borough, Álvaro Obregón. The transfer is from the Community of San Bartolo de Ameyalco to the affluent community of Santa Fe in the outskirts of Mexico City, Mexico. This article made me think about the predicament that our Acequias are experiencing in the south valley community of Atrisco and the Middle Rio Grande. In Mexico, the conflict between the authorities and the Pueblo of Ameyalco has to do with the fact that plans were made without informing the Pueblo about the transfer of water from their local community to another community. Now, what does this has to do with us here in the US Southwest, you might ask?

Our own area here in Atrisco is being threatened by the dark veil of development that promises a lot and delivers very little. This is the case of the Santolina Master Plan being proposed in the West Mesa of Albuquerque, which is promising to be another economic engineer with “75,000 jobs.”

Beyond the “economic hook” that rings in everyone’s ears, the Santolina Master Plan is projected to be a 38,000 housing development project that is expected to house 95,000 people. This development is supposed to be a complete city with open spaces, schools, and an industrial area. In a hearing at the County Planning Commission on May 28th, a representative from Consensus Planning declared, “Albuquerque Water Utility Authority has indicated that there is ample water supply to meet the area’s needs over the next forty years.” This notion is false and after looking at current and expected water levels, the 2040 plan, and drought conditions; the general consensus is that there is actually no water to support another city in the west side of Albuquerque. If a development of this kind is approved, it will only mean huge water conflicts in the future.

So why do all the Acequias, the South Valley Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, the Atrisco Land Grant, SWOP, CESOSS, Bosque Action Team, and many more organizations oppose this development?

Basically, the Santolina Master Plan is not viable in terms of the water it requires. The development will be expected to use 19.66 million gallons per day, with a total demand of 38.7 million gallons per day which is the equivalent of ~43,350 acre feet per year (see Santolina Master Plan, page 14). This means that the Santolina Development Project would use about 90% of the total San Juan/Chama water diversion (allocated, not guaranteed).

In the long run, we are looking at the subsequent de-watering of wells in both the North and South Valleys. The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) has projected an “Excess Demand in 2030” of 46,602 acre feet per year, and that does NOT include the 43,350 acre feet per year that The Santolina Development is projecting to use for its development over the next 40-50 years. So the question is: How is the city and the county is planning to meet demand when the water numbers are not balancing out and drought will continue to affect water acquisition and delivery?

If the Santolina Master Plan is approved, it is likely that Acequias with ‘vested’ pre-1907 water rights would be threatened. The South Valley Regional Association of Acequias (SVRAA) are concerned that this development would seek to acquire and “retire” existing water rights from our parciantes from irrigated lands in the Middle Rio Grande Administrative Area to satisfy a development of this magnitude.

The people from Mexico’s Ameyalco and their allies are already fighting a struggle to keep water in their communities. Here in Atrisco we have been opposing the same trend of moving water from one region to satisfy the needs of another region for a long time now.

It is too early to tell whether the people from Ameyalco will prevail, and certainly there is a long way for us to also stop the Santolina project. I am sure that a lot of people will think that development is what we need. Here in Atrisco, however, we will keep advocating not only for keeping our water rights attached to the land, but also to abide to the Sacred Covenant we have to protect the water needed for the well-being of our future generations. ¡EL AGUA NO SE VENDE, EL AGUA SE DEFIENDE!