



OPINION

# Great Park now about profits, not people

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I agree that the Great Park audit is a cautionary tale, but not for the reasons presented by Irvine Councilwoman Christina Shea and county Auditor-Controller Eric Woolery in their recent opinion columns. Even Christopher Money, who was hired to produce the audit, acknowledged that he did not “perform audit or other examination services as defined by the American Institute of Public Accountants.”

The question must therefore be asked: If the audit was not really about what was spent and what was built, what was it about?

Launched nearly two years ago, this so-called audit seems to have been a calculated effort to assail the reputations of the political leaders, designers and contractors who dared to embrace a public vision for the Great Park. Those who applaud the “transparency” of this audit are clearly not aware that the two-member subcommittee of Christina Shea and Jeff Lalloway unilaterally directed the expenditure of \$1.3 million in taxpayer dollars with no staff oversight and the unchecked authority to hire their handpicked team of lawyers and consultants. No oversight. No accountability. No transparency.

I know the history of the Great Park project better than most. I was there in 2002 when the El Toro Airport plan was finally defeated and the opportunity to create a great metropolitan park for the people of Orange County was secured. How ironic that Larry Agran, a civic leader who consistently fought for public interests, should ultimately be defeated by a campaign of smears funded by the same development interests who now stand to make billions building on land secured through his efforts.

Adding insult to injury, consultants and even council members, have had the audacity to compare Irvine – recognized as one of the “Best Run Cities in America” – to the city of Bell, national poster child for municipal fraud and abuse. The truth is, every penny spent on the Great Park was authorized through a public process, is fully accounted for and was invested in the planning, design, construction and activation of dozens of park features enjoyed to this day.

The so-called “audit” has been nothing more than a clever smokescreen created to distract the public from an unprecedented transfer of development rights from the city to private developers. Mayor Steven Choi and Council members Shea and Lalloway gave FivePoint Communities another 4,600 houses and control over 688 acres of public land. By focusing depositions on personalities, opinions and power plays rather than facts and finance, headlines based largely on false or misleading conclusions were generated to fuel the aggressive campaign of lies and smears in Irvine’s election last November. Larry Agran lost. Developers won. It all worked out as planned.

That will be the legacy of Choi, Shea and Lalloway, who have made this politicized “audit” a higher priority than city planning, a park vision and the quality of life for Irvine residents.

I’m proud of what was accomplished during the years when vision, innovation and balanced planning defined our city. What we’ve seen these past three years is how quickly things can change. Did we dream big? Yes we did. The award-winning Ken Smith master plan inspired the imaginations of thousands of Orange County residents through an unparalleled public process. We built the park planning process around public engagement, cultural and recreational experiences and celebrating Orange County’s agricultural and military heritage. Now, private developers are in charge and, instead of a canyon, we’re getting a golf course. It’s now about profits, not people. Hardly an inspired vision.

The final reports presented by auditor HSNO and the law firm of Aleshire & Wynder revealed not one dollar of unaccounted for funds or unauthorized expenditures. When will that headline to appear in local papers? A \$1.3 million audit that has done nothing but serve political agendas and damage Irvine’s reputation. A worthwhile investment of public funds? I think not.

*Beth Krom is an Irvine councilwoman.*

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