

**Animas Valley Action Coalition Meeting  
Durango Public Library, April 29 2023, 10:00 am – Noon  
Rally for Our Valley**

**I. Slide Show - Animas Valley**

**Darlene Koontz, Facilitator**

Meeting called to order at 10:06A

**a. Introductions**

Darlene introduced herself as facilitator and introduced the core committee members; Dot Wehrly, Brenda Fernandez, Tom Penn and Sheila Lee. Also acknowledged were David Sanderlin, who created both the slideshow reel and the now active website; [AVACDurango.org](http://AVACDurango.org). Michelle Brown is posting AVAC announcements on Nextdoor. Don Rickelman has been conducting significant research on the legal aspects. Minutes were recorded by Kathy Boike.

There were approximately 55 residents in attendance. All attendees participated by sharing their name, location, and reasons for being present.

**I. Guest Speakers - Let's Educate Ourselves, Information on the Animas Valley**

**Marie Roessler** has called the Animas Valley home for 30 years. She purchased the [Kerr House](#) on County Road 203 in 1992 which has been listed on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties since 1998. She is also on the board of the Animas Grange.

Marie moved to Durango from St. Louis. She reminisced that back then many things were so different in the county. To learn more about the history of our region she spent countless hours at Fort Lewis College scanning articles, newspapers and books. Durangoans can learn more about our region in a series of (4) volumes titled *Pioneers of the San Juan Country* available at the Durango library. The history was published in the 1930s, written by Sarah Platt Decker from the local chapter of D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution). Marie went on to highlight the first 15 settlers and shared some stories.

As an avid gardener she has unearthed many historical treasures on her plot of land. Marie shared artifacts that included an army button from the 1880s, likely from a soldier stationed at Fort Lewis and Hesperus. Also found discarded items included silverware, a wooden door knob, pieces of turquoise which were buried in trash pits used for burning.

**Sarah Burch** is a Fort Lewis College graduate and has a masters from North Arizona University. Sarah has been the Animas Riverkeeper with the [San Juan Citizens Alliance](#) since 2022. She is a full-time advocate for protecting and restoring the river's health, ensuring safe, reliable access for recreation, and promoting transparent and responsible water management.

Sarah shared that there is not a lot of access along the river and what is available is loved to death. The river access lot in question is about 1.5 acres of land. It has been private land to this point so the access has been unofficially used. The proposed Roberts Resort development gave an opportunity to appeal for better access. Since the property was sold there has been great concern that the access

**Animas Valley Action Coalition Meeting**  
**Durango Public Library, April 29 2023, 10:00 am – Noon**  
**Rally for Our Valley**

could be eliminated. Sarah reached out to the landowners and developers. The current access is very dangerous in its slope and substantial native vegetation. There are no signs at the access point that would indicate there is a 10-mile gap to the next exit/access point which is Oxbow Park. Should this access point be eliminated, the only other access point is near Silverton.

The current status in talking with the developer is whether they would donate the lot as a conservation easement but that does not absolve liability. They were receptive to a possible donation of the land but there is still a concern with who is going to take it on. She is exploring many options and submitted an application in 2023 through the RTCA (Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance) program for a conceptual site plan.

In addition to improving safety, we need a spot to passively recreate including picnic areas, upgrades to boat ramp and parking. The access is primarily used between late May and June and would conservatively require space for 15 cars and up to 3 trailers. A public access trail along the Roberts property would also be usable. In addition to ownership issues, there would need to be a deliberate effort to include usage enforcement, signage, education, and long-term maintenance. Other access points in town are operated by the Durango Parks & Rec but their budget is already spread thin.

## **II. Goals for the Land**

Tom Penn, chairperson for the Research Focus Group, explained a few goals that have come front and center such as:

- Acceptable with restrictions?
- 100 sites mixed RV and tiny homes?
- 100 RV sites, no tiny homes?
- No RV resort?
- Alternative use of the land?

The objective is to coalesce all these viewpoints to come up with a plan to move forward with the end goal of making a presentation to the Board of County Commissioners.

## **III. Who is Roberts Resorts & Status of Roberts Resorts Village Camp**

Darlene presented a map of all the [Roberts Resorts](#) developments throughout the United States. The developments start with RV pads, mobile camps or mobile homes on them. Over time, they transition more of the RV pads by converting them to tiny home parks. Other RV Park developers have figured out this strategy which has resulted in changing the original intent of many developments. A lot of these parks are 300+ sites. To see what they are doing, go to their website and educate yourself on how Roberts Resorts developments change to more mobile home park type development.

Dot gave background on the history and current status of the project.

- 10/11/2022; the initial sketch plan was filed with the planning department.
- 11/14/2022; the planning department sent requests for comments to the affected agencies
- 11/17/2022; notifications were sent to adjoining landowners

**Animas Valley Action Coalition Meeting**  
**Durango Public Library, April 29 2023, 10:00 am – Noon**  
**Rally for Our Valley**

- 12/07/2022; a neighborhood meeting was held at the Animas Grange
- 01/12/2023; the planning commission hearing was held. Most in attendance objected.
- 02/07/2023; the sale went through at \$4,635,000. Diaga (Palmer) still owns the northwest piece that appeared to be part of the Roberts Resort parcel according to the sketch plan.
  
- 02/15/2023; RR filed an application for a special minor land use permit, basically asking for all the next steps in the process. Likely it is going to be delayed due to staffing issues at the planning department. We have heard that the county has had problems with interpretation of the land use code which is an area we need to focus our efforts on. Once the application is completed, they will send it out to all the applicable agencies to respond within 21 days. We will need to press for a neighborhood meeting because it is not necessarily required. Most importantly, we need to get it before the elected officials on the Board of County Commissioners because the planning department is not sufficient.

**V. Top 10 Potential Impacts of this Development**

The list of the top 10 impacts was provided as a handout. Darlene highlighted some of the most critical.

- #1 *Water* and what improvements will be needed to accommodate this development.
- #2 *Access* to the river and whether it will remain accessible.
- #3 *Sanitation* through Hermosa Sanitation. The buildout will require additional capacity needs. The sanitation district was built to provide service to RESIDENTIAL only. This is a commercial project and what happens is that it will destroy all the natural biomes that are necessary for the current type of waste system. Concern is that resorts with Class A RV sewers will dump into the Hermosa system and essentially destroy it. The other option is to convert to a mechanical system which would cost millions.
- #4 *Park model cabins* will be converted to units that will be sold and exceed the maximum stay guidelines in our code.
- #5 *Night skies*. So many RVs are adding decorative lights that will affect the night skies that we treasure.

**VI. Updates from the Focus Groups (Legal, Research, Communications & Administrative)**

**Communications** – Dave Sanderlin, one of 13 volunteers on the Communications Group, talked about all the materials developed to get the message out. The information table included large flyers to post around town, a postcard with key points, tips for sending letters to the editor of which all be made available on the website [AVACDurango.org](http://AVACDurango.org). Dave also reviewed the website navigational tools.

**Legal** – Dot Wehrly talked about the [AVDP](#) (Animas Valley District Plan) and [AVZD](#) (Animas Valley Zone Districts) documents that are easy reading and concise. There are links on the website for navigating directly to the documents on the La Plata County site. The AVZD is the critical piece that gives us the grounds to fight this type of development. The current flood plain plan does not allow for development up to 500 feet back on this parcel. The new plan MAY be reduced to 50 feet back which would allow RR tiny homes. Intensity is a key stumbling point and the code needs to be

**Animas Valley Action Coalition Meeting  
Durango Public Library, April 29 2023, 10:00 am – Noon  
Rally for Our Valley**

clarified. She also mentioned that a Go Fund Me campaign may be the way to fundraise for a land use code attorney. The group is still researching to determine cost before they can seek funds.

**Research** – Tom Penn talked about the top 10 hit list which can be found on the website. He asked that attendees dig into the topic they are most interested, to learn more and be able to provide a defense.

**VII. Next Steps, What Can You Do, Final Questions and Comments**

Once the application is accepted, please read, write letters, attend planning meetings, hand out flyers and posters, educate other residents, volunteer for a focus group.