

Groups consider action after Santa Maria approves ICE facility

LEADERS MOVE ON LOCAL, NATIONAL FRONTS IN WAKE OF VOTE



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Two groups that appealed construction of a controversial Immigration and Customs Enforcement Facility in Santa Maria are taking action after the City Council upheld the facility's development permit Thursday night.

The local chapter of the [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) will work with lawyers through its national organization to see if legal action against the city is possible, members of the group said Friday.

"We are going to pursue some type of action, we don't know what yet, but that's for the LULAC board to decide and that's what we're talking about," said organization member Willie Galvan, one of more than 1,200 people who protested against the [ICE facility](#) at Thursday's meeting.

Christina Fialho, a representative from Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement, said she's looking to address the problem on a national level, which would affect the facility ICE expects to begin building in Santa Maria in a few weeks.

"What we can do now is work with our congressional representatives to push for true comprehensive immigration reform that eliminates the unnecessary imprisonment of hard working community members and eliminates the need for detention facilities," she said.

Galvan said he was very disappointed with the council's [3-2 vote in favor of the facility](#).

"Some of the council members are not looking at the sentiments of the community and don't even care apparently," he said.

Jack Boysen, one of the councilmembers who voted to uphold the Planning Commission decision to approve the facility's permit, said he doesn't want members of the community to live in fear of deportation, but ultimately thought that ICE's presence would be a good thing.

"They really aren't out to do raids on the worksites, they're out to (get) bad guys off the streets and I don't have a problem in providing support for that," he said.

Jorge Gil, a Guadalupe resident who was escorted out of Thursday's meeting for shouting while a representative of ICE addressed the council, said he considered the council's approval of the facility a "foregone conclusion."

While Mayor Alice Patino voted along with Councilwoman Terri Zuniga to overturn the permit, Gil wondered if she knew the vote would go through and decided to oppose it in order to appease some voters.

"She loses nothing in voting against it this time anyway, and maybe she tried to save a few votes," Gil said. "I'm a little cynical that way, so I see it as a little more of a political maneuver."

Patino said that wasn't her intention, and that she voted against the facility because she felt it was important to listen to the community.

"I can say I never go into a meeting with any preconceived idea of what we were going to do," Patino said. "And I think we all had to do a lot of soul searching and a lot of thinking."

Fialho said she was encouraged to see the mayor's opposition to the facility.

"I was inspired by the mayor, who stood beside her community," she said. "I think voters will not forget that come election time. And I was inspired by the people who came out of the shadows."

Hazel Davalos, a community organizer for [Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy](#), said her group will continue to collect signatures to make City Council seats elected by district instead of

at large, a move she said is meant to focus leaders more intently on their constituents. If she gets enough signatures, the issue would be put on the ballot in November, when the seats of councilmembers Boysen and Willie Green will be up for election.

Davalos said her organization has registered more than 100 people to vote in Santa Maria in the past month, a number resulting from the ICE issue.

“We’re lucky if we get that in a year most of the time,” she said. “And (it’s) because so many people realized why it was so important to vote.”

CAUSE, local growers and business owners will hold a press conference on Monday at [City Hall](#) to address the next steps in the ICE issue, Davalos said.