

Top 10 stories of 2012

Top 10: Fight over Angwin land will spill over to 2013



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Napa County is well acquainted with land-use fights, and 2012 saw a bitter one spill out in the small Upvalley town of Angwin that pitted Pacific Union College against a conservation group, Save Rural Angwin.

A years-long fight between them culminated with a ballot initiative, Measure U, that would have downzoned three parcels of land the college owns, with the intent of keeping future housing developments away from Angwin.

The Angwin land battle ranks as the Napa Valley Register's No. 7 story of the year.

Save Rural Angwin got its start several years ago during a fight over a failed development proposal called the “ecovillage,” that would have seen a developer purchase land from the college to build housing. The college scrapped plans for the project, but the dispute flared again when PUC pursued selling land in Angwin, possibly to a developer.

Measure U was soundly rejected countywide, as it only garnered 40 percent approval from voters, but attracted the largest sums of money relative to other local race on ballots this year.

Arguing that the measure was an unfair treatment of its property rights, PUC pumped about \$450,000 of its own money to defeat the measure, spending on lawyers, consultants, a series of TV commercials, signs and mailers.

By contrast, Save Rural Angwin raised about \$100,000 for ads, mailers, signs, and lawyers, but wasn’t able to keep pace with the college’s campaign.

Each side still has its last financial report to file for the end of 2012, so those tallies could grow with last-minute accounting.

Next year, Save Rural Angwin members will be watching closely to see what the college does with its stated intent to sell some of its land to boost its endowment, including which parcels and who’s buying.

Napa County Supervisor Diane Dillon said she wants to bring both sides together next year for a meeting, with the hope of easing tensions between them and finding a compromise.

After Measure U’s defeat, PUC Vice President John Collins said he hoped for an opportunity for PUC and Save Rural Angwin to work out their differences.

SRA Chairman Mike Hackett said his group was willing to talk as well, but only if it didn’t involve sacrificing its principles of land conservation and preservation.

Will either side reach agreement, or will the dispute continue? The answer may come in 2013.