

## What's Wrong With Riverside?

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On Wednesday November 4th a historic vote was cast in favor of the much-touted March Healthcare Development Project (MHD). The March Joint Powers Planning Commission (MJPPC) voted 6 to 2 in favor of the proposed development, with the City of Riverside casting the two dissenting votes. This project has the potential to bring high pay jobs to a highly depressed area.

So why did the City of Riverside vote no? What's wrong with Riverside?

For those of you who are not familiar with the March Joint Powers Authority (MJPA), they are the governing body that has been tasked to "bring jobs" to the surrounding area, by reusing surplus land that was once owned and managed by the United States Air Force. They have 4400 acres under their umbrella with the bulk of that (3713 acres) located in the City of Riverside.

Getting a project approved is a two-step process. First the "Planning Commission" recommends approval of the project and then the "Commission" actually approves the project at a later meeting. The Planning Commission and the Commission consist of the same eight city and county officials.

Not if the City of Riverside has its way. The Riverside City Council is opposed to this project because it will benefit the City of Moreno Valley more than it will benefit the City of Riverside.

Riverside is the "Orange County" of the Inland Empire and they plan to keep it that way. If you don't have a "Crest" attached to your neighborhood (Hillcrest, Woodcrest, Canyoncrest, or Orangecrest) you are not worthy to be included in the growth and prosperity that is coming to this area.

As I mentioned above, the City of Riverside cast 2 votes against the Healthcare project with Riverside City Council member Andy Melendrez voting against jobs, growth and prosperity. Andy is looking out for what is best for the City of Riverside and not for what is best for the County of Riverside.

Councilman Melendrez would have us believe that he is concerned about the increased traffic the project would bring to the City of Moreno Valley. Really? The MHD would be developed on 170 acres and yes, that would increase the traffic flow on Cactus and Alessandro Blvd heading into Moreno Valley.

My question is, where was the concern about traffic when the commissioners representing Riverside approved the Meridian Business Center Project? (MBC). The Meridian project consists of 1,290 acres west of the 215 freeway between Alessandro and Van Buren Blvd; in the Orangecrest area of Riverside.

What about the increased truck traffic on Van Buren and Alessandro Blvd in Riverside? Why didn't the commissioners representing Riverside vote against that project? Could it be because the project will benefit their city more so than Moreno Valley and Perris?

The Meridian Business Park will eventually bring much need tax dollars to Riverside, and as a resident of Riverside, I am not opposed to that. What I am struggling with is, why is it okay for Riverside to benefit from jobs and growth but not the Moreno Valley/Perris communities?

We have 17% unemployment in this area when the national average is 10%. As a pastor and community leader, I hear the cries of my congregation and guests who are seeking employment so they can live the so-called American dream. My ear is no different than the many pastors in Riverside, Moreno Valley, and Perris, who are serving their communities faithfully, with the hope that their elected officials will do the same.

Our hope is that the MJPC will vote yes on the project on November 18 and not be bullied by the City of Riverside. Our hope is that Andy Melendrez will show up to vote on the 18th and not call in sick, or be otherwise unavailable for this historic vote that will once again put the Inland Empire on the map.

Councilman Melendrez is not to be vilified for his position. He has aspirations to be the Mayor of Riverside one day, and we wish him well. He is just following the wishes of his colleagues on the Riverside City Council.

The MJPA is tasked to bring jobs to this area. How could anybody vote against a project that will do just that? What's wrong with Riverside? Hopefully nothing.