

## **Chino Valley Alliance works beyond opposition to RV park, sets up action arm**



Rachelle Fernow, chairwoman of the Chino Valley Alliance For Responsible Growth (CVAFRG), co-founded the group in February 2022. (Stan Bindell/For the Review)

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Members of the Chino Valley Alliance For Responsible Growth (CVAFRG) declared victory when a proposed RV park they opposed withdrew its proposal and the alliance expects to have an impact on the upcoming Aug. 2 primary for Chino Valley Town Council, but their main message is that citizens can use their organization to make their voice heard on issues impacting the town.

Regardless of the election outcome, the alliance makes it clear that it's here to stay.

Rachelle Fernow, chairwoman of CVAFRG, said the alliance was created to oppose the RV park, but has become so much more than that.

The alliance has also formed a political arm to support candidates for Town Council with write-in candidate Robert Switzer as the lone candidate they are supporting in the Primary Election. She emphasizes that they are non-partisan, but they support candidates who want to protect water, land and lifestyle regardless of party. She said one of the keys is opposing high density housing.

Fernow co-founded the alliance along with Juliann Baker. They asked Switzer to run because they were impressed with the work he has done with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

She said Switzer is not joining the race for any monetary gain. "He just cares about the community," she said.

Fernow said she wants council members to put in the time to do the research on the issues they vote on.

"There is a record of certain people (on the council) voting together. We would like to see more of a democracy, not just following the leader," she said. "We would like to see more challenging and thoughtful discussions. If they don't have the answers, they need to continue the issue until the next meeting."

Fernow noted that the council often approves several consent items at one time without any discussion or explanation of those issues, unless one of the council members asks that a certain item be discussed separately.

She said a council member told her that if nobody challenges a topic that they have no choice but to approve it.

"They still need to do the right thing," she said.

Fernow said Switzer is the only one the alliance's political arm supports because they feel that the current council didn't handle the RV park proposal in a good way, does not charge developers impact fees and has let developers go forward without providing the infrastructure. However, she said most of the challengers are inexperienced.

She said, when the RV park proposal came up, most citizens didn't know how to challenge the proposed rezoning. "It was like the community was submissive, but we refused to submit," she said. "We had to figure out how fight it. We needed a format."

Thus, Fernow said they have become a resource for the community.

"We want to get the neighborhood involved," she said. "We want to be the community involvement advocate for any neighbor with anything regarding the town, especially if it's infringing on their land or water rights. We want to help them with a well thought out challenge. The community can have its voice elevated through us."

The alliance was created this past February.

"What we have achieved in this time is due to our wherewithal and community support," she said. "But we need more contributors, especially if they have a special skill set like water resources or if a developer wants to discuss how they can do it in a more responsible way."

Fernow emphasizes that they are not anti-development, but want responsible development.

"That we have no impact fees for developers is preposterous," she said. "Most developers expect it."

Fernow said without impact fees the residents get stuck with the cost of fires, public safety and infrastructure. She said a fire at the site of the proposed RV park would have been disastrous. She said one of the council members said that if the developer had to pay for the infrastructure that they wouldn't come. Fernow believes that is irresponsible to not have developers pay impact fees.

"We need an RV park, but in a different location," she said.

Fernow said while they declared victory when the RV park proposal was withdrawn that even that fight is not over as the property remains in escrow without any end date. The sale of the property was contingent on the rezone that didn't happen, so she doesn't know what to expect next.

"I assume they will do something on the land," she said. The land is zoned for five acre agricultural residential.

She said the owner of the proposed RV park thought he was dealing with a naive community.

Fernow said the alliance plans to be involved in more than land issues as they want to have community cleanups and back-to-school drives.

CVAFRG has about 500 members so far, but hopes for much more. "We're not exclusive to a political party. We're non-partisan," she said.

Fernow thanks Save the Dells for showing them how to set up their political arm as aside from backing candidates they can also have petition drives or run recalls. She encourages residents to vote in the town election as about 50% of registered voters cast their votes in the last election. She said this means someone could get elected with a thousand votes or less.

The alliance doesn't have regular meetings, but it had a large gathering at the Chino Valley winery and has hosted a meet and greet for the council candidates. They hope to have more community gatherings and invite community members to host events.

Fernow would like to see varied topics with guest speakers.

She said Chino Valley never had a group like this before as the residents didn't think they would have to fight for their land and water rights.

"Now, the problem is over development," she said. "It's disheartening that some projects were approved eight years ago and have not been completed."

For more information, visit [www.chinoalliance.org](http://www.chinoalliance.org).

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