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**Proposal for Neutral Assistance**

**Prepared for:** San Mateo County MidCoast Advisory Council  
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**Overview of Situation**

On Wednesday evening, May 10, 1995, the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (PCRC), a non-profit volunteer based organization, presented information to the MidCoast Advisory Council of San Mateo County. At the request of the Council, PCRC described the range of dispute management and resolution services that may be useful in the context of community concerns relating to Devil's Slide.

Complex community issues such as the Devil's Slide situation have the following characteristics:

- a large amount of complex, technical information associated with the situation
- multiple stakeholders with varying degrees of *access to* and *understanding of* information
- varying degrees of mistrust, personal agendas among stakeholders
- lack of a neutral forum or process for the exchange of ideas as the preliminary stage of consensus development
- multiple individuals and groups with strongly held positions about the appropriate resolution in the situation
- general skepticism about the potential for success in a consensus building process

What PCRC brings to the consensus building process:

- neutrality (no position or stake in outcome)
- process experience/expertise (assisting individuals and groups to work together to develop mutually acceptable resolutions in community issues)
- fairness: key individuals and groups are provided with equal access to the process
- management of the process without involvement in the substance of the outcome

As a local dispute management and resolution resource within San Mateo County, PCRC has experience in offering the following services in complex community dispute situations:

- facilitating communication-written and oral-between involved parties

- assessing interest in a consensus development process
- designing a process, in consultation with local representatives, through which individuals and groups have the opportunity to communicate in a facilitated setting, share information and possibly work towards agreements
- providing neutral facilitation of meetings
- providing technical and clerical support for the process

For PCRC to intervene in a situation, our organization must be invited in by at least one constituency group that is willing to explore the possibility of assistance by a neutral third party. In this situation, the invitation has been issued by the MidCoast Advisory Council. The attached proposal addresses suggested possible phases for proceeding with a consensus process.

Residents of the San Mateo County coastside are faced with a difficult situation in which they are being impacted on a daily basis by the consequences of the damage to Highway I at Devil's Slide. There are a number of powerful interest groups that are taking a role in making the decision about a roadway alternative. These constituencies include CalTrans, groups united around environmental concerns, local municipalities, and county government. The MidCoast Advisory Council represents residents of the unincorporated central coast area. Local residents do not, at this point, speak with a united voice about the issues of concern to them, and many appear to be feeling frustration in trying to obtain a "place at the table" for decision making.

In addition, the community on the mid-coast has many members who are expressing strongly held views that may be at odds with those held by their neighbors. In the absence of a forum for discussion and exchange, this situation could lead to negative confrontation and long term negative consequences for the community.

PCRC, working with local community members, may be able to assist with providing a neutral facilitated forum, where ideas, information and concerns can be shared respectfully and the community has the chance to forge some consensus and clarify issues on which consensus is not possible. This effort might allow local residents to speak on their own behalf as the long term decisions about Devil's Slide are being made. At the very least, this process would allow neighbors to speak constructively with each other and preserve community relationships.

# Proposal submitted to the MidCoast Advisory Council by the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center

## Phase 1: Information Gathering

• Work with local advisors to identify key individuals and groups who should participate in a community consensus building process. This consensus process would have the following goals:

1. identify the range of issues and interests present in this current situation
2. validate areas of agreement and explore areas of disagreement
3. share information and get feedback
4. discuss approaches for positive community participation in the decision-making process around the Devil's Slide issue.

• Interview members of key constituency groups in the coastside community to assemble information about the scope of concerns and community relationships involved in dealing with the Devil's Slide dilemma. In the process of gathering this information PCRC also provides information about the consensus building process and explores stakeholder interest in participation. The information that is gathered is assembled without evaluation and presented back to the parties involved for validation.

**Fee:** \$50/hr. for staff support to volunteers who are conducting informational sessions with individuals or groups.

**Estimate:** \$500

## Phase 2: Conflict Assessment and Design of Consensus Building Process

PCRC would use the information gathered from and validated by stakeholder groups to design a consensus building process to be implemented within an agreed upon time-frame. Participants in the process must agree to participate in good faith, cease (put on hold) activities which would undermine the process, develop a representative process for groups which share a position and observe agreed upon groundrules for the process.

**Fee:** \$50/hr. for staff support for scheduling, meeting attendance, conflict assessment and process design.

**Estimate:** \$250

*Note: PCRC intervention would stop at this point unless there is agreement to proceed with implementation of a community consensus building process.*

### **Phase 3: Implementing a Consensus Building Process**

If there is agreement by key local community stakeholders to participate in the proposed consensus building process, PCRC would be able to provide neutral assistance in the following ways:

- Meeting management (preparation, agenda development, logistics, facilitation)
- Record keeping
- Between meeting support
- Mediation of specific areas of dispute
- Overall process management

**Fee:** \$50/hr. for process support , \$50 to \$100/hr. for meeting facilitation

**Example:** One large community meeting with facilitated small group sessions would be billed at \$100/hr. Such a meeting would require at least 4-6 hours.

**Estimate:** \$500

**Total Cost:** The initial phases of this proposed process could probably be completed for around \$800. If there is interest in proceeding through a community consensus development process, the cost would be dependent on the number of persons/groups involved, the length of time needed and the degree of support required from PCRC.

**Note:** Funding for such a process should come from multiple involved constituencies and should be administered by a non-involved entity, to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest for the neutral facilitating agency.