

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC LANDS**

Clark County Regional Government Center  
May 7, 2008

Jackie Brady

Honorable members of the Committee, Legislative staff and visitors, on behalf of the Town of Laughlin, I would like to welcome you and thank you for including Laughlin in your list of communities that you are visiting. There are a lot of public lands in our State, and Laughlin has its share. Although we have more privately owned land than ever before, nevertheless, only 12% of all land is in private ownership. Over the years, our ability to develop and grow has been impacted by this factor.

A brief history - Laughlin became an unincorporated town in 1976—only 32 years ago. It encompasses 80 sq miles, much of which is mountainous—it runs from the California border on the west and south, the Lake Mead National Recreation Area on the north, the Colorado River and Arizona on the east, and the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation on the southeast.

In 1980, the town then known as South Pointe had a population of 93. Earlier, it had received its name when the local postmaster at the small post office in Don Laughlin's Riverside Hotel determined that people needed a place name to which to send their mail. Although the postmaster is nameless, the place name became Laughlin. Don Laughlin remains the hotel's owner and is still operating the Riverside after 42 years.

Of the 93 residents in 1980, about 51 were property owners who were either part-time or vacation-only residents. There were 65 dwelling units (28 mobile homes/travel trailers, 32 condominiums and 5 single family dwellings). The median age was 48—today it is 46. Today, more than 40% of our residents are over the age of 54, which is double the national average. Back then, there were three casinos and the Mohave Generating Station. Arizona supplied the labor pool

needed. There was one police officer (who would later become the justice of the peace) and one full-time fire chief who oversaw the volunteer fire squad. Laughlin children attended school in Bullhead City, Arizona. Davis Dam served as the only bridge between the two states and water taxis transported people back and forth. All the major roads leading into town were winding and two-lane. Casino Drive was paved but the rest of the in-town streets were unpaved. Individual businesses and residential developers provided wastewater disposal; power was supplied from Needles, California and the 113 telephone connections were provided by CENTEL. There were no public transit or public water treatment facilities.

Since that time, Clark County and associated governments have invested several hundred millions of dollars to put into place the needed infrastructure. As the town grew, so did revenues to the State because of the gaming and Mohave Generating Station. By 2000, the state was receiving an annual net revenue amount of about \$37 million to spend in other places around the state. In 2004, then Governor Kenny Guinn told guests at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Laughlin Chamber of Commerce that Laughlin has “... *helped our state economically—tremendously ... You are what we call an exporter. You export money out of this community instead of having to have the state export money from somewhere else to help you.*” He complimented us for planning ahead and providing the necessary infrastructure prior to development which he noted not many other communities had done.

Today, with a full-time population of 8,600 and at least 3,000+ snowbirds who come in the winter, Laughlin has indeed grown. There are ten gaming properties and more than 11,000 rooms. Mohave Generating Station supplied much of the power for the local areas up until December 31, 2005 when it closed as the result of a consent decree concerning environmental controls. All roads are paved and the two major highways are either now four-lane or about to be.

Generally the information we are providing today can be found in the newly updated Laughlin Land Use Plan, adopted by the County Commission on September 5, 2007. In that year, there were 3,895 dwelling units with 42% being single-family and 58% multi-family.

Our County Planning staff has observed that the mix of unit types makes Laughlin the most urban community of its size in the western United States. In fact, peak density of up to 4,000 to 5,999 people exists in Section 28. As you know, the residential area is a few miles from the resort area and lies on each side of Needles Highway, a county highway.

Laughlin children attend Bennett Elementary and Laughlin High School in town and efforts are underway to see about getting a small outlying UNLV campus at the high school.

Deborah Murray  
Good morning.

In the early 1990's, just when Laughlin began to experience long sought after development – there was not enough infrastructure to support immediate growth. In order to “play catch-up” the County imposed a development moratorium in Laughlin until water and sewer services could be provided. Even though the County achieved its goal to provide infrastructure, Laughlin missed the building boom in the time that this took.

Both the tertiary water reclamation treatment plant (capacity 8/mgd) and the water treatment plant that were built in the early 1990s are not at capacity. As a matter of fact, the peak day for the water reclamation plant in 2004 was 4.1 MGD—51% of design capacity. It returned 2,829 AF that year as return flow credits. The water treatment plant of Big Bend Water District, operated for many years by the County's Sanitation and now Reclamation District, has a current capacity of 15 million gallons/day and is expandable to 30 MGD. Its peak day in 2004 was 6.4 MGD—about 43% of its capacity.

Today - Even though, both facilities are at approximately half capacity Big Bend and the Water Reclamation District are analyzing their supply systems to accommodate land use pattern changes and to coordinate with future land use plans.

Nevada Power and Southwest Gas supply energy needs and residents have cable television with high-speed internet. The public

transit system is highly used and operates 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. In addition, we have a full-service, stand alone post office, the largest library in rural Clark County, and the state opened up a mental health clinic almost three years ago.

Jackie Brady

In the late 1980s, Don Laughlin built a bridge and donated it to the state. The Davis Dam access was closed in 2004 to all vehicular traffic because of national security considerations. Therefore, the Laughlin bridge and the AVI bridge on the Fort Mojave Reservation a number of miles to the south are the only bridges. When the Laughlin bridge is closed due to maintenance or an accident, it presents a real problem for the many going to and from work, doctors, hospitals, etc. As a result of this situation, we have been able to get approximately \$21 million from Congress for a second river bridge. The Environmental Assessment is almost complete and final design will be launched soon. Although eight sites were initially considered, one site seems to be the best one but no formal decision has been made yet. We are still seeking additional funding for the bridge as well.

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Since Laughlin's tourism market is a drive-in one with about four million annual visitors plus thousands of workers and residents crossing over the river daily, it makes sense to alleviate the distance and provide safe means of getting to Laughlin.

Deborah Murray

As tribal gaming has expanded in California and Arizona, the competition for tourist visiting Laughlin has, of course, become more intense. Recognizing the more attractive we can make the community will only add to the positive experience a visitor has, we are planning or launching several projects:

As Jackie mentioned above, Laughlin is surrounded by public lands, so we've spent years partnering with, and working with the National Park Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Land Management, State Parks and State Lands, and many other agencies associated with both the public lands and the river for recreation development.

Laughlin has been awarded approximately \$35 million in Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) Parks, Trails & Natural Areas (PTNA) funding to plan for the Laughlin Regional Park (LRP) and develop the Nevada "North Reach" portion of the Laughlin Heritage Greenway Trail that will expand the Riverwalk to north of the Laughlin Bridge. The trail will link to a new day-use area and will provide many new trail amenities. This project will include a "signature" overpass and a new underpass - over and under SR163 to connect the Lake Mead National Recreation Area with the rest of the township. A spot for a Multi-Use Events Center is also part of the concept Plan.

Included in the Regional Park will be a desert-style golf course to replace what was Laughlin's only golf course – previously known as the Emerald River Golf Course - that is now closed.

Later, Reclamation will show a 13-minute video of what's being planned and developed. The North Reach has finished its environmental assessment and is now in final design, with construction scheduled to begin in the Fall of this year.

The North Reach is only the beginning of the Town's bigger vision of an expanded Riverwalk in Laughlin. The North Reach will connect to the Riverwalk the Resorts have already constructed. New land uses adjacent to the river will be asked to participate and the remaining public lands, such as the Big Bend State Park, and the newly acquired County Southland will join in to eventually link with the tribal lands.

In addition to all this planning and new development, many beautiful and well-visited recreation areas already exist in Laughlin. There is the Big Bend of the Colorado State Park that has just experienced extensive enhancements and renovation, the Mountain View County Park that many say is the most beautiful and well-kept in the County, the new County Aquatic Center and the privately developed – public Laughlin Bay Marina with its Riverwalk, boat launch and interpretive areas.

**Jackie Brady**

Recognizing that our economy was facing some real challenges because of competition in the gaming industry from the surrounding states, we commissioned an economic development strategy—two phases are completed with a third one on its way. It is not easy to diversify nor is Laughlin known for anything but gaming and being a hot place in the summer. Nevertheless, so much has been invested in this community and it shows. People who come here thinking they will not like it here soon find they love it in spite of the Summer heat. Every few years, we hear the rumblings of some residents wanting to incorporate into a city which eventually will happen.

Concerning land, it was because of the federal and state Fort Mohave Valley legislation that was passed in the late 1950s and early 60s that Laughlin was able to develop. This legislation enabled the Colorado River Commission to purchase 15,000 acres from the federal government for development with also an eye toward economic development for this area. The four owners of the Mohave Generating Station bought the first 2,500 acres for a power plant. Land was sold to private developers and most of the community that you see was the result.

When the State Legislature transferred the remaining acreage to Clark County in June 2007, there were still over 9,000 acres left. In the past, it has been difficult to develop here in Laughlin because of the vast majority of the land was either federally owned or state owned. With the County's important acquisition of the new Southland 9000 acres, and other land sited for development in Laughlin - This is changing.

**Deborah Murray**

In 2005, through the sponsorship of our office, working closely with County staff and the BLM, more than 2000 acres in north Laughlin were offered in an auction. All of the smaller parcels sold at an average price of \$117,00/acre. Five of the 200 acre-plus parcels still remain on the disposal list for a future auction.

Additionally, the closures of the Emerald River Golf Course (approx 325 acres on the River) and MGS (approx 2400 acres in the center of Town) affords the promise of new private development for the future.

Jackie Brady

With the transfer of the 9,000 acres specifically for the purpose of sale/lease for development, it is important that the right type of preplanning and stewardship occurs. We have approached UNLV's Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies to provide assistance. In addition, the County Commission tagged the Laughlin Town Manager's Office to administer the law and the land. We believe it will be important to dedicate a staff person in our office to monitor, market and oversee the planning and sale activities associated with this land. These 9,000 acres, which we call Southland, lie in the south between the residential community, the Fort Mohave Indian Reservation and the River.

Although while under the administration of the Colorado River Commission, the proceeds for any sale or transaction of the land went into a fund to be used only in Laughlin for capital projects, there was an incidence where that agency used \$5 million from the fund to pay an unrelated debt. A legislative request for the \$5 million was made during the last session, instead the Legislature had the remaining land and fund transferred to Clark County. Nevertheless, leaders in the community have insisted that the \$5 million should still be paid back and has urged lawsuits if it is not. Several of the elected representatives of our area made a request that the Governor place the \$5 million in his proposed budget.

At any rate, the town now has land that can be developed over time. Up until now, the Arizona side of the river was able to attract more retail businesses, medical facilities, residences, etc. although the real attraction for the area and its hub is Laughlin. Lack of land, cost of land, longer and more stringent development processes and standards all have contributed to the slower pace of growth. People are attracted to this area—especially those approaching or are at retirement age.

Laughlin was only able to benefit in a small way during the last housing boom. With the national economy as it is, Laughlin also is feeling the effects of high gas prices and other situations across the nation are impacting our tourism industry and hence our whole economy.

We continue to have an eye toward the future. Recent efforts by local leaders have included addressing possible changes in the development processes with the County to minimize undue delays when trying to develop here.

Laughlin has weathered many storms in its short history but we still have great hope for its future as people continue to move into this area. Once again, we thank you for coming to Laughlin.