

Minutes of Meeting on Zoning in Atenas

By Marietta Arce

On October 16th, Costa Rica obtained the necessary votes to become part of the Security Council in the UN. This is a position we have sought energetically and we believe that one of the reasons we were successful is our long-standing culture of peace, especially in these turbulent times when it seems disputes are settled with violence rather than dialogue.

As an example of thinking globally but acting locally, the Municipal Council received us in an extraordinary session to talk about the Zoning Plan and here is a summary:

About 40 people from various walks of life were present, motivated by our concern for the county. The session began with a prayer and a minute of silence for the victims of the recent tragedy in Fatima and their families. This was led by Alvaro Castro, sports authority in the county.

Rigoberto Chaves presided and he turned the session over to Mr. Jorge Mora, representative of Pru-Gam. Mr. Mora talked about Pru-gam (responsible for regional zoning plan) and IDOM, the company hired to coordinate the local zoning plans.

Mr. Mora reiterates that zoning plans should not be construction manuals, as has been mentioned often in the past by Mr. Eugenio Gordienko. They should instead be thought of as long-range guidelines that take into account the future growth of the county while considering the aspects that are specific to it and those convenient to maintain. He says that the needs and desires of the general population should override those of individuals. He admits that while no zoning plan is perfect or pleasing to all, the majority of the population must feel satisfied and listened to.

Mr. Mora says that citizen participation is indispensable and that representatives of different institutions make up committees that work various technical aspects. We asked for the names and institutions represented in these committees but the answer was not clear and we will follow up.

After Mr. Mora, Nancy Solano (coordinator of work sessions between Pru-gam/IDOM/Citizens) spoke briefly of the work done so far. She admits that attendance and convocation haven't been the best and that Atenas has decided to work on a district basis but that the sessions have just begun. She urged us to visit Pru-Gam's website to familiarize ourselves with the process and subjects it covers. She also says that the council advised her that sessions on 10/20 or 10/27 are not possible in Atenas because of scheduled events and that Pru-Gam/IDOM have commitments for all the Saturdays in November, making the first possible work session in December or January. This is another point which was not finalized and on which we will follow up.

The Zoning Plan work was officially begun in March 2007. IDOM has 18 months to conclude, with one possible extension. We feel that we must energetically promote the process so that it can be concluded and quickly.

In essence, nothing that we didn't know was told to us and the session was opened for questions:

What happens when there is no Zoning Plan? The answer was clear. Mr. Mora states that there is legislation in place which covers all the points addressed in the Zoning Plan and in the absence of the Zoning Plan, the Municipality has the authority to issue permits based on legislation. He admits that the legislation is existent but that controls are lax.

What about the landfill/garbage dump we hear about? Mr. Mora says no plans to create a landfill/dump have been addressed as the garbage issue is a complicated one which requires further discussion.

Mr. Fernando Mora speaks about meetings held outside of Atenas with people born here but residing elsewhere. He tells of these concerned people and their contribution with concrete ideas and a desire to be a part of the process. He mentions the possibility of using the installations at the Punta Leona office in Uruca since it is more private and there is less competition from the street noise.

Liliana Prado speaks for the Chamber of Tourism, emphatically confirming what we have been saying: our only motivation stems from our desire to serve the community, it is part of our organization's mission and our wish is to work with other groups and advance on this subject.

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We will be following up on the above, as CATUCA has been since July 2004 when we actively participated in the presentation of a document written by Mr. Eugenio Gordienko entitled, "Zoning and Developing Plan". The presentation of this document was accompanied by a motivational workshop for the Municipality of Atenas at the iECAG (School of Animal Husbandry). It is interesting to note that one of the people who participated in this workshop, invited by Mr. Gordienko, was Mr. Jorge Mora.

We will be in touch with the Municipality to schedule the date for the next workshop so that we can continue to give our ideas.

Thanks for your attention, have a good day.

Marietta Arce, Secretary, CATUCA