

NICAN: Sand Creek Byway fight isn't over

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SANDPOINT -- The Sand Creek Byway fight isn't over, said North Idaho Community Action Network representatives at a Wednesday forum on the proposed project.

More than 140 people attended the meeting. Some of them came to support NICAN, some to offer suggestions and all to hear NICAN's foreboding vision of what the bypass will mean to Sandpoint if the Idaho Transportation Department constructs it.

NICAN's Pierre Bordenave told those who attended they should contact ITD and their legislators to prevent construction of the byway and speak up at public hearings.

"The law says that they have to listen to you," he said.

ITD has misled and misinformed the community about the actual impacts of the byway if it is constructed, Bordenave told the crowd.

The community has been worn down to acceptance rather than support, said Bordenave, who presented for the group at the meeting.

The byway will lead to more traffic congestion, more stoplights and Sandpoint will not get its streets back, he said.

"We're getting no commitments for getting our streets back. None," he said.

The byway will destroy the tranquility of Sand Creek, one of Sandpoint's greatest natural resources, he said.

"Communities with a future embrace these waterways," he said.

ITD has shown false images of the byway's future in their "Photoshopped" renderings with nary a truck in them, said Bordenave, who envisioned lights, traffic, noise and pollution.

If the byway is built, it will take many years for vegetation planned for the project to grow, if it grows at all, he said.

"We don't get to see that beautiful picture that's 'Photoshopped'," Bordenave said.

"We will have graffiti and we will have an ugly looking mess down there," he said.

The group emphasized the massive size of the proposed structure.

"It's only one pier in Sandpoint, but 2,700 feet of wall," Bordenave said.

The construction will devastate the creek because it will narrow the channel to five feet in winter.

"How are we going to accommodate the creek if you're going to have five feet of winter channel?" he questioned.

It will also negatively effect the economy. People stop and spend money because of the town's amenities, which will be reduced in Sandpoint when the byway is built, he said.

The byway will also encourage businesses to move to Ponderay, which will result in loss of income for Sandpoint. Years of construction for a project that ultimately will not fulfill long-term needs will also damage Sandpoint's economy, he said.

"ITD has failed to disclose the negative economic impacts," he said.

NICAN is not against a byway, but against building a highway in the creek, said Pierre Bordenave, who spoke for the group at the meeting.

Bordenave told the crowd that the community had been pushed toward the Sand Creek route because ITD had not given enough information and viable alternatives.

Bordenave said NICAN is not against building a byway, but against the location selected.

"A waterway through my town should not be a byway," he said.

The group suggested an alternative route west of town laid out using computerized mapping of resources and buildings.

Audience member Celeste Generaux, an engineer, suggested ITD build a tunnel, although others noted that trucks carrying hazardous materials cannot use tunnels, and that accidents inside tunnels are grave.

Bob Fontanilles wanted to see Highway 95 traffic rerouted onto Pine and Fifth, saying he believed traffic downtown is the real problem.

"You don't have a traffic problem in Sandpoint," he said.

- The Idaho Transportation Department will take public comment on the hotly-contested environmental effects of additions to the proposed Sand Creek bypass project during a June 3 public hearing at the Bonner Mall from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.