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Great Park contractors helped bankroll political slate mailer

Donations went to committee backing city measure on mailer with Agran, Kang, Krom

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IRVINE – Contractors tied to the city and Lennar Corp. Great Park projects have contributed more than \$60,000 to a campaign committee that has helped bankroll a series of political mailers backing the current council majority, according to campaign financial reports filed last week.

The contributions by nearly a dozen Great Park affiliated firms were made to the Yes on Measure R committee, which in turn contributed about \$124,000 to the Community News and Views, a weekly political slate mailer sent to Irvine homes backing Councilmen Larry Agran and Sukhee Kang, Mayor Beth Krom and council-hopeful Todd Gallinger.

Several firms subcontracted through the Great Park Design Studio contributed to Yes on Measure R, including \$10,000 donations from Forde and Mollrich, Gafcon Inc. and Ken Smith Landscape Architect Inc., as well as a \$2,500 donation from Fuscoe Engineering and an \$1,800 donation from Green Shield Ecology.

Also donating to Yes on Measure R were several Lennar Corp. subcontractors tied to the developer's projects surrounding the Great Park, including \$10,000 from Hunsaker & Associates, \$9,000 from RBF Consulting, \$5,000 from CST Environmental and \$2,500 each from two men tied to EDAW.

The Yes on Measure R committee supports a city ballot initiative asking residents to back the current governance and direction of the Great Park. State records show the committee has raised just under \$197,000 this year, with the vast majority of its expenditures going toward the Community News and Views slate mailer.

Community News and Views was presented to residents as a newspaper published by Frank Lunding, a long-time Agran associate. The mailer's critics claimed it is deceptive, but supporters say it is clearly marked as a campaign piece, and serves to rebut negative stories in the mainstream media.

Slate mailer operations such as Community News and Views are unrestricted by the city law limiting campaign contributions. A slate mailer must include at least four candidates or ballot measures.

Agran contended the donations were made specifically to back Measure R, not the candidates.

"It is after all a measure that ratifies and implements two to three years of work in planning, designing and building the Great Park and charts a path to move forward," Agran said. "I'd be shocked if people who are involved in that effort on a daily basis aren't keenly interested in Measure R's success."

But Councilwoman Christina Shea, who is running against Kang for the open mayor's seat, accused the Great Park contractors of trying to protect the council majority that gave them their contracts.

The latest campaign finance disclosure period also saw the return of Planning 2020, which drew heat during the last election for receiving a series of donations totaling \$120,000 from Maguire Properties shortly before the developer submitted updated plans for a development in the Irvine Business District. Planning 2020 in turn financially supported Hometown Voter Guide, a slate mailer operation that created a series of fliers backing Krom and Kang.

The council ended up approving a nearly \$10 million settlement with Maguire after a series of closed-door meetings, ending a long-running dispute with the city over developer fees. The decision was later challenged in court by Planning Commissioner Greg Smith and council candidate Pat Rodgers. Maguire Properties and Kang and Krom denied any link between the council decision and the donations to Planning 2020, which they say were meant to support the renewal of Measure M, the half-cent sales tax that funds projects countywide.

Lunding, publisher of Community News and Views, is listed as a principal officer for Planning 2020. State records show that Planning 2020 raised \$98,000 from investor Anne G. Earhart, an active contributor to Democratic causes, and \$24,500 from General Investment Funds Real Estate Holding Co., whose president, John Katkish, sits on the Great Park Conservancy Board of Directors.

Planning 2020 reported donating \$110,000 to the Yes on R committee.

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