



ARIC CRABB/STAFF

The Newmans' first vinyl sign imploring neighbors to help "Stop the Graveyard" recently succumbed to the ravages of time and weather. There's a crisp new one now, and they hope it helps get their message across, Holly Newman said.

Cemetery

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will come before the county Planning Commission for a hearing sometime in late summer or early fall. "I don't know how much work we have ahead of us."

It's all taken way too long for Sid Corrie Jr., who owns the land where the cemetery would be. "It's the same cemetery I was talking about 10 years ago; it's absurd," said Corrie, who contends the area still needs burial space.

"Everybody's going to die someday, unless they've got something else going," said Corrie, who suggested other cemeteries simply don't want the competition.

Planning for the big cemetery has certainly moved more slowly than has the world around it. Since the first version of Creekside Memorial Park was floated in 2005, thousands of new homes have been built in the Dougherty Valley and Tassajara Valley, some of them close to the prospective cemetery land along Tassajara Road south of Highland Road. Those houses all use water, and the need to keep the turf and planned landscaping green is cited as another reason by opponents that the cemetery would be a drag on resources.

Additionally, many of the

new residents are of Asian ancestry, and some of them have been outspoken about a cemetery so close to their homes being a cultural affront.

"For immigrant Indian and Chinese, most of them favor cremation, and we don't see the need for this; we're not going to use it," said Jian Jay Yao, an eight-year resident of the Windermere housing tract bordering the cemetery land on the southwest.

But Corrie insists there is a need, as there was over a decade ago when the San Ramon City Council approved calling for plots on unincorporated land beyond its eastern boundary, the Tassajara Valley. Danville, Dublin and Pleasanton embraced the idea, too.

"Four mayors came to me, and they said a cemetery is definitely needed in the Tri-Valley," Corrie said.

But after that, thousands of new houses were built in what were then rural expanses, including the Dougherty Valley and the Tassajara Valley. San Ramon withdrew its support for the project in 2014, and other groups — Save Mount Diablo, Greenbelt Alliance and the Tassajara Valley Preservation Association, to name a few — never were on board. Their motivations may differ in detail — curbing urban sprawl, preserving wildlife, preserving a rural way of life — but water is a common bond.



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disagree, and contend a newly released Water Efficient Plan for the cemetery still isn't enough to keep the project from being a water-waster.

Bill Newman stood in his driveway off Camino Tassajara, pointing down the hill to an old tanker truck. He uses it to haul water from Tassajara Creek to the cattle watering trough several hundred yards to the west when the well goes dry. That's inconvenient, he said; when neighbors have to truck in their water when their wells go dry, it's very expensive.

The Newmans' property off Camino Tassajara is separated by Corrie's land by a standard barbed-wire fence. The grave markers, under the existing plans, would go right up to that fence. And 30 feet would be lopped off the large ridge a few hundred feet north of the Newmans' property line.

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"People have asked us, 'So what's wrong with a little country cemetery?'"

Contact Sam Richards at 925-943-8241.

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"It's a poorly conceived development project that puts unnecessary strain on our dwindling water supplies," said Matt Vander Sluis of the Greenbelt Alliance. He also said Creekside Memorial's approval could set a dangerous precedent for development expansion beyond county-established urban limit lines.

Corrie said talk of the cemetery causing water shortages is "baloney."

"If we didn't have the water," he said, "we wouldn't be able to do it."

Bill and Holly Newman