

Opportunity Village  
Lucy Stewart, Board Member

House Committee on Natural Resources  
Tuesday, July 26, 2016 - 9:00 A.M.  
Council Chambers at North Las Vegas City Hall  
2250 North Las Vegas Blvd.,  
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030

Mr. Chairman, Council members, I am pleased to be here today to offer testimony. My name is Lucy Stewart and I am a long-standing Board member of Opportunity Village, a community organization serving more than 1,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities monthly, and more than 3,000 people annually.

As Las Vegas and southern Nevada have grown over the last 20 years there has been a dynamic and accelerated interest in making affordable land available for important public purposes in support of state and local governments AND “qualified nonprofit organizations”. Examples of important public purpose needs include land for schools, fire stations, municipal facilities, parks, churches, and other facilities to provide community services, similar to the services provided by organizations like Opportunity Village. There are many great community organizations working diligently to use their resources to effect the most significant benefit to the community.

As members of our community we are afforded opportunities to engage in meaningful ways. Because we, as the Board and donors of Opportunity Village, have invested so significantly, the people served by OV have those same opportunities. When the bus stopped coming for Aasha, after she turned 22 years old, her family didn’t know what would be next. After two unsuccessful transitions, Aasha has found a place where she can be productive. Every morning, Aasha gets out of bed to prepare for her day. She readies herself, and departs for work. Her work is a day habilitation program where she continues to learn how to communicate, interact socially, and learn new vocational skills. Our belief that community is connection reaches many people.

Steven is anxiously awaiting the development of new residential space that will allow him the opportunity be close to where he works. He will be more independent, safer, and able to be more involved in social and recreational

programs. Having tried to live in a community setting with minimal supports, Steven was often taken advantage of and ridiculed.

Scott, once very productive, has reached a point in life where he needs a slower pace and more supports. He needs to have people around him who understand his needs and are able to assist him in completing daily tasks. At Opportunity Village, he can be engaged, participate in multiple programs, and still earn a paycheck. For us, that is what community is; pride, purpose, and a paycheck.

Since 1954, when Congress enacted the Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) Act, the BLM has been able to make land available to nonprofit organizations, through sale or lease, at little or no cost depending upon the circumstances. Specifically, nonprofit organizations may lease or purchase land for uses consistent with their articles of incorporation or creating authority at one-half of fair market value, or 90 percent if the use is not open to the public.

Anyone interested, and qualified, in proceeding is generally required to submit an application to the local BLM office. Processing time varies, depending upon existing workload and other priorities. This can be challenging during times when land values are escalating and competitive land sales and other disposal actions are precluding the ability of nonprofits to obtain affordable land under the R&PP Act in locations that meet the public need.

Opportunity Village has recently completed a purchase of land from the BLM. Throughout the process, our team found the representatives of the BLM Field Office here in Las Vegas to be responsive, cooperative, and timely. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to purchase land to further the mission of the organization and we look forward to building a facility that will serve the needs of our community.

While we are pleased to have completed the purchase process, it would have had greater positive effect if the funding spent to purchase the property could have been utilized to directly benefit our mission. Opportunity Village raises approximately 80% of its operating budget – more than \$46 million annually, and the most recent economic impact assessment identifies a direct benefit to our community totaling more than \$33 million annually. The \$2.4 Million spent on land could have been used more directly to provide supports to the hundreds of people like Aasha, Steven, and Scott who languish on waiting lists.

We are not unique. As I stated earlier, there are many community organizations working to benefit communities around our country and their fundraising dollars could be better served by directly being applied to their missions. We are here to offer our situation as a “case study” to encourage your consideration to make land available to qualified non-profits on a zero cost basis.

Respectfully, we request the Committee look at the following recommendations:

- 1) Direct BLM to work closely (and proactively) with local nonprofit organizations to make additional land “in the Las Vegas Valley” available for Public Purposes prior to public auction and create an opportunity for qualified non-profit organizations to purchase land at a nominal fee or zero cost basis.
- 2) Reduce and/or eliminate Cost Recovery requirements for qualified nonprofits and dedicate staff to timely respond to valid applications.
- 3) Reduce and/or eliminate regulatory requirements and duplicative environmental review when transferring land “within” the BLM disposal boundary.
- 4) Require BLM to work more effectively with nonprofits balancing economic development needs recognizing that less than 15% of “all land” in Clark County is privately held.

In closing, we offer our thanks, on behalf of the people served by Opportunity Village and their families for the opportunity to present our testimony. Given the opportunity to acquire land at no cost, organizations like ours could utilize those funds to benefit more people like Aasha, Steven, and Scott.