

# Judge rules Palos Verdes Estates land swap with wealthy homeowner was illegal



The retaining wall, athletic field were illegally build on parkland adjacent to the property of the Lugliani family. (Chuck Bennett / Staff Photographer)

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2 COMMENTS

A Los Angeles Superior Court ruled this week that the city of Palos Verdes Estates and the Palos Verdes Homes Association illegally transferred public parkland to a wealthy couple in May 2012.

In Monday's ruling, Judge Barbara Meiers reversed the sale and determined the city and its homes association acted illegally in making the deal that transferred 1.7 acres of public parkland to private homeowners Robert and Delores Lugliani.

The decision transfers the land back to the Homes Association and prohibits future sales of public land in Palos Verdes Estates.

"This ruling is a big win for all Palos Verdes Estates residents who value our open space, which is a critical ingredient in what makes PVE a truly special place to live," said John Harbison, leader of the Citizens for Enforcement of Parkland Covenants.

In 2012, the Luglianis made a lucrative \$1.5 million donation to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, ending a long-running legal battle between the district and homes association over the purchasing rights of two separate parcels of public parkland.

In a closed-door deal, the homes association transferred ownership of two parcels in Lunada Bay between Palos Verdes Drive and Via Pacheco to the city in exchange for a 1.7-acre parkland that wraps around the Luglianis' Via Panorama property.

The association sold the land to the Luglianis for just \$500,000 — \$400,000 to the homes association and \$100,000 to the city of Palos Verdes Estates — and forgave the Luglianis for past illegal encroachments on the parkland.

The Luglianis' newly acquired property became a privately owned open space, as per city law, and satisfied all parties in the deal, the [Daily Breeze reported in 2013](#).

The deal, which was described as a win-win, shocked residents who were angered by the city's lack of transparency.

Harbison and the CEPC filed suit against the city, the Palos Verdes Homes Association, the school district and the Luglianis in May 2013, claiming the deal violated the community's strict land-use covenants. The district later was dropped from the suit the following year.

"I love where we live, I love how it's set up and just felt that the parkland was very special. It's part of our heritage," Harbison said. "Once they sell parkland and get away with it, it sets a bad precedent that makes the other acres vulnerable."

The City Attorney's Office issued a statement saying the city is disappointed in the court's decision and is evaluating its options.

"The council will not have a chance to confer with the city attorney until July 14, at which time the council will discuss the implications of the ruling and decide how it will proceed, including whether to appeal the court's ruling," the city said in a statement.



On Tuesday, the Palos Verdes Estates Planning Commission will consider whether to rezone that former parkland from open space to residential status. Among the many opponents expected to attend is John Harbison. (Chuck Bennett / Staff Photographer)