

I-423 James P. Wood

Comment Letter I-423

August 14, 2017

Planning and Development Services
Attn: Ashley Smith, Environmental Planner
County of San Diego
5510 Overland Avenue
San Diego, CA 92123

Subj: DEIR Public Comments for Newland Sierra: General Plan Amendment and Specific Plan PDS2015-GPA-15-001 (GPA); PDS2015-SP- 15-001 (SP); PDS2015-REZ-15-001; PDS2015-TM5597;

Dear Ms. Smith and Mr. Slovick,

I am writing this letter with concerns in regards to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Newland Sierra Development. For context, I am Gunnery Sergeant enlisted in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) currently stationed in San Diego, I am the Anti-Terrorism Officer (ATO) for my unit, have a B.A. in Religion from the American Military University, and am a member of the Hidden Valley Zen Center. My concern for the purposed project primarily falls into two categories: fire hazard safety and the accommodation of religious practices.

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As the ATO for my unit, part of my duties is to provide risk assessments for natural disasters that could cause the loss of life or destruction or property to the government. This includes the fire hazards. Additionally, mitigation factors are included in these risk assessments. Currently, the threat of fire in Southern California is rated by the USMC as High, the highest threat category used, and is amongst the most vulnerable rated in the nation. Without extensive mitigation, the risk to life and property is also high. Since the area where the Newland Sierra Development is planned falls within the region of this risk assessment, a similar risk applies.

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In the event of a fire, which is a likely and high threat in Southern California, an appropriate fire evacuation plan should be included in the project. My concern is that the few access routes in and out of the valley will be compromised from emergency services in the case of a wildfire, that any "shelter in place" plan would not be a viable mitigation due to smoke becoming trapped in the valley, that the congestion of an evacuation by the increased residents and offices would not only prevent the response of emergency services but would obstruct the evacuees from reaches safety, and that all of these factors combined could cause a catastrophic loss of life. An independent Subject Matter Expert needs to conduct a study on the project, and their assessment included with an appropriate risk mitigation plan, so that the project can be overhauled to prevent such an event. When will such a study be conducted and implemented?

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My second primary concern is in regards to the religious practices of the Hidden Valley Zen Center. Zen religious practice has long been established to rely upon strict silence in order for the long and varied forms of meditation to be accomplished. The failure of the DEIR to provide a detailed sound study and the impact upon the practitioners and their practice at the Zen Center should the project be developed appears as a blatant attempt to deny them their protected constitutional right. Not only has no study been conducted but no steps have been taken to ensure

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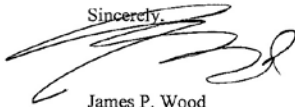
that their religious practices are accommodated by the project. When will such a study be conducted and what measure is being put in place to ensure that the practice of the members of the Zen Center are protected?

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Cont.

I implore you to recommend against the Newland Development, prevent a catastrophic loss of life due to fire, protect the religious practices of those at the Hidden Valley Zen Center, and require this and all other future developments to adhere to the strictest scrutiny without reproach to ethical standards.

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Sincerely,



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