



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

February 15, 2008

Jacqueline Onciano
Monterey County Planning Department
168 West Alisal St., Second Floor
Salinas, CA 93901-2487

Subject: Comments on Draft EIR for Rancho Cañada Village Specific Plan

Dear Ms. Onciano:

The League of Women Voters of the Monterey Peninsula has reviewed the Draft EIR for the Rancho Cañada Village Specific Plan which includes 281 mixed-use residential units with 140 deed-restricted for Affordable and Workforce housing; 2.5 acres of parks; 39 acres of permanent open space; construction of a levee; movement/placement of 200,000 cu. yd. of fill to raise the project above flood levels; and extension of Rio Road into the proposed project. The following comments are submitted for your consideration:

1. Carmel Valley Master Plan. The DEIR finds the project consistent with the following nine Carmel Valley Master Plan (CVMP) land use designations and policies. Our analysis finds the project would be inconsistent with these policies and would, therefore, have significant impacts on land use.
 - A. The project site is designated for public and quasi-public use. The DEIR finds that with amendments to land use designations and zoning to accommodate the proposed project, "the Specific Plan is considered to have less than significant impacts related to land use" (p. 3.5-12). Using the logic of amending policies to be consistent with projects, all policies would be found consistent. This would render general planning meaningless.
 - B. Policy 3.1.1.2 provides, "... for slow release of runoff water so that runoff rates after development do not exceed rates prevailing before development...". The project would not meet runoff retention policies of either the County or the CVMP as noted throughout the DEIR (pp. 3.3-29; 3.2-20; 3.2-27). Instead of finding the project inconsistent with this policy, the DEIR finds the County's policy "impractical" (p. 2-10). Additional mitigation measures including Low Impact Development Design Standards adopted by the City of Salinas should be incorporated into the project.

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- C. Policy 6.1.3 provides, "All beneficial uses of the total water resources of the Carmel River...shall be considered and provided for in future planning decisions" and Policy 6.1.4 requires management of the river. The project is found consistent because it would result in a decrease in water demand. Rancho Cañada Golf Course has water rights to 700 AF from the Carmel River aquifer. It currently uses between 309 to 684 AFY with the project site using 138 AFY (p. 3.10-7). The projected water demand would be 120 AFY which is a 17 AFY reduction over current use for the project site. This leaves over 30 AFY available for future uses (700 minus 684AF + 17 AF). Unless the applicant returns the "unused" water to the State, the project cannot be found to reduce water use. At a time when the State is preparing to issue a Cease and Desist order regarding water use from the river, anything less would violate the public interest.
- D. Policy 7.1.3 requires projects be sited to protect riparian vegetation, and Policy 16.2.6.1 requires restoration of the river. Because the DEIR does not identify the source of 100,000 cu. yds. of fill from on-site and does not evaluate the impact of a Rio Road extension to the project nor the placement of rock on the eastern slope of the river, it is unclear if riparian vegetation would be protected.
- E. Policy 26.1.21 states that it is intended that Camel Valley remain rural in residential character. The project is found consistent with this policy because it is located adjacent to existing development and would prevent residential units from being dispersed throughout the Valley. A 281unit high-density development is not rural. Further, it is not located next to existing development, i.e., adjacent to the most eastern shopping center where Brintons is located.
- F. Policy 26.1.23 requires open spaces to be located to maintain a distinction between more rural and more suburban areas of the valley. The DEIR indicates that because of the habitat reserve and the existing golf course, this open space would create a buffer between the project and the remainder of the Valley. A buffer already exists between development at the mouth of the Valley and the golf course. The project would reduce the size of the buffer.
- G. Policy 39.1.6 requires construction of the Hatton Canyon Freeway. "If the Freeway has not been built, the Board shall limit further development until the freeway is under construction." The project is found to be consistent with this policy. The Freeway will not be built.
2. The DEIR does not address the impact of extending Rio Road into the project area.
3. Proposed traffic mitigation measure TR-1 requires contributions toward signalization of the Laureles Grade and Carmel Valley Road intersection. This measure is inconsistent with the CVMP which recommends shoulder improvements rather than signalization.

4. Proposed mitigation measures to address hydrological impacts need additional evaluation. Mitigation HYD-8 requiring protection of the eastern slope with rock or some similar hard substrate may have impacts on biological resources and aesthetics. These impacts are not addressed. Mitigation HYD-9 would replace the existing unconsolidated berm at the western edge of the project area with a floodwall or reinforced berm to withstand erosion. However, the DEIR finds this improvement needs further study to ensure it would not increase flooding. This study must be done prior to completion of the FEIR.
5. The DEIR does not address the project's impact on upstream residences on Via Mallorca. The upstream analysis only considers the most eastern portion of the project site.
6. The analysis of air quality is incomplete. Because the duration of construction and proximity of construction activities to nearby residents and the Carmel Valley Middle School are unknown, the analysis uses a typical "construction" period. An analysis based on a complete project description should be prepared. Additionally, the analysis excludes ozone precursor and diesel exhaust emissions from 7,200 truck trips needed to transport 100,000 cu. yds. of fill from off-site at 257 trips per day for 28 working days. Further, the air quality analysis does not include dispersion modeling for particulate matter or risk assessments for diesel exhaust and acrolein emissions. These modeling procedures must be undertaken given the proximity of the project to the Carmel Middle School and nearby residents. Uncontrolled particulate emissions and diesel exhaust are very harmful to people with respiratory illnesses. Finally, proposed mitigation measures would only be implemented if feasible. This provision would not assure that emissions would be reduced to levels that would protect public health.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the document.

Sincerely,



Janet Brennan
President