

SCOPE
Santa Clarita Organization for Planning and the Environment
TO PROMOTE, PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY
AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE SANTA CLARITA VALLEY
POST OFFICE BOX 1182, SANTA CLARITA, CA 91386



1-20-15

Tyler Montgomery
LA County Dept. of Regional Planning
320 W. Temple St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Via email to tmontgomery@planning.lacounty.gov

Re: Comments on the Aidlin Project # 00-136, VTT 52796 and associated approvals

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

This project proposes to build 102 single-family dwellings and associated supporting infrastructure including local roadways, two 250,000-gallon water tanks with a pump station, water quality treatment basins, and an emergency secondary fire access road within a 230.5-acre Project site in the urban/wildland interface area of Pico Canyon. The Project would require approximately 1,600,000 cubic yards of cut material, which includes 300,000 cubic yards of over excavation.

Public Process

We continue to object to the County Regional Planning Department's failure to hold hearings before the full regional Planning Commission for the Draft EIR. While the Planning Commission heard mundane issues such as cell towers and alcohol permits during the period when a hearing examiner who has no decision making power, conducted a public hearing for this project. Thus, this 102 unit project in a high fire hazard zone that may put future residents in danger will receive only cursory review at the FEIR stage from the Commission. We assert that the County's failure to give such questionable projects only cursory review in an effort to "streamline" the CEQA process, instead constitutes an abdication of its duty to fully vet such projects. Failure to ensure that future residents are safe from fires, that the General Plan is followed and that the environment is protected will rest solidly with your Department because of this lack of good process.

General Plan Amendment Required

First, we believe that this project is not consistent with the current general plan. Just because an application was made over 17 years ago does not constitute a legal reason for failure to be constituent with existing plans, including both the County General Plan and OVOV, approved in 2012. The OVOV area Plan update for the SCV also promised our community a green belt around the Valley and that additional growth would focused on infill. Again, a Plan Amendment must be required for this proposal. Please explain why it is not being required.

We oppose the proposed zone change required for this project. It does not meet the burden of proof required for such a change since there are thousands of already approved but unbuilt units in the Santa Clarita Valley. There is no need for a project like this in a high fire hazard area

where substantial public funds will be required to extend water and sewer services. With all the already approved but unbuilt units in the Santa Clarita Valley, there is no requirement for the additional housing.

The DEIR seems to make several statements that are out of date and should be corrected for accuracy. It describes a grading schedule which will begin in Nov., 2015 (already out of date since this is Jan 2016 and the project has yet to receive several approvals), and a “draft” Los Angeles County General Plan, which in fact was approved in 2015. (p.4.1-2)

Cumulative Analysis Incomplete

While some unbuilt projects are listed on page 3-2 of the DEIR, many already approved but unbuilt housing projects have not been disclosed, such as Tesoro del Valle, West Creek, Tick Canyon, Spring Canyon and the Keystone project. These projects represent thousands of units which were not included in the analysis. Failure to disclose this huge backlog of unbuilt units affects the decision makers’ ability to judge whether the burden of proof presented in the approval process is accurate. Without adequately accounting for all unbuilt units that will require services, the DEIR will lead to a false assessment of infrastructure needs. This invalidates the cumulative analysis. Please identify all housing that is approved but unbuilt in the SCV and discuss how the County will meet any burden of proof required to approve this additional unneeded housing project. Please include all housing in the cumulative analysis section.

Fire Hazard

According to the DEIR, this project is located in a Very High Fire Hazard Zone¹, and has in fact suffered a major fast moving, wind driven wildfire as recently as 2003. However, the design proposal includes only one road for ingress and egress. We assert that only one egress creates a severe public safety issue and should preclude approval for this project. The project should not be approved without a second means of evacuation during a fire or other emergency.

The fire hazard section describes a few mitigation measures such as stucco sides on houses that are already required by the building codes. Such measures will not protect homes in this area when faced with a wildfire under high wind conditions as regularly occurs in this area. We therefore oppose approval of this project when there is only one road out and in. It creates a dangerous condition for future residents and makes it hard for fire trucks to access the area.

Last, residents will have trouble obtaining fire insurance in this area. If they can get it at all, it will be very costly. Notification and disclosure of this fact should be required to be made to any future home purchasers.

Defending this area from wild fires will be very expensive for the County. We ask the County provide a cost of services study for this development and begin to generate fees to ensure that adequate financing of fire services can be provided, or if new housing should be permitted at all in such areas.

Sewage

There are no sewage facilities that access this project. New sewage lines will have to be extended. No analysis of whether or not the nearest line (ending at Southern Oaks) is adequate

¹ DIER Page 4.7-20

to handle this additional flow, was included in the DEIR. Nor were any impacts from extending the sewage line described.

Water Supply

In our Notice of Preparation comments we brought up several issues which the DIER now fails to address. We re-iterate our NOP comments here and ask that they be addressed in the DEIR.

While we generally concurred with the findings of the initial study and the discussion areas proposed for the EIR, we stated that the initial study had erroneously concluded that there would be no impact to water supply.

We re-iterate – we are now in the third year of a drought that has impacted the entire state. The Governor has declared a drought emergency, which according to our last two Urban Water Management Plans should result in a slowdown of new development approvals and a close look at available supplies. The Santa Clarita Valley is currently under drought restriction water rationing that requires all residents to cut back on their water usage by 28%. It is hard to understand how the water agencies, especially Castaic Lake Water Agency, can have accurately projected sufficient water supplies, if we now must cut back while having less than HALF the population anticipated in the general plan update. One can only conclude that the modeling is inaccurate and must be re-evaluated. The water information in the Initial Study does not correctly describe this situation. The DEIR should thoroughly address the water supply availability in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Neither has CLWA accurately disclosed the spread of the ammonium perchlorate pollution plume that has caused the closure of two additional water supply wells, V201 and V205. Both these wells previously supplied water to the Valencia Service area identified as the supplier for this project. Therefore a current Water Supply Assessment for this project should be requested and reviewed for accuracy by a County planner familiar with water issues. The issue of drinking water supply pollution by ammonium perchlorate and VOCs must be thoroughly addressed in the EIR. All well closures and the reduction in supply due to the closures should be included in the EIR. Any spread of the pollution plume that is being caused by continued pumping should be discussed.

Further, the Aidlin project appears to be outside the service territory of both Castaic Lake Water Agency and Valencia Water Company. Castaic Lake Water Agency illegally acquired Valencia Water Company by means of an eminent domain proceeding in 2012 without receiving permission to expand their service area from the legislature as required by their enabling legislation. This acquisition is now under Court challenge. Certain other statutes were also violated so that ownership and regulatory oversight of Valencia Water Co. is now in doubt. Due to these facts, the California Public Utilities Commission revoked Valencia's Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity. It is now unclear who has regulatory oversight of this agency and how water service to new customers will be provided. This issue must be addressed before any approvals relying on water service from Valencia Water Co. are granted. (The CPUC Decision was attached as Exhibit 1 to our NOP comments)

The DEIR fails to disclose that this project is not currently in the Valencia Water Company Service area and would have to be annexed in, instead relying on an email to show

adequacy of water supply is not acceptable. In fact, the entirety of the water supply analysis seems to be one paragraph that includes an estimate of how much water will be used without any disclosure as to how this figure was derived. It includes the sentence “*According to the Valencia Water Company, there is adequate water supply for the Project.*” (pg. 6-22) which is apparently based on an email.

Since no Water Supply Assessment was required or supplied, one cannot know the current impacts or cumulative impact of this project in light of the Drought Emergency. This lack of information makes the water section wholly and completely inadequate. An adequate water section should be provided and the DEIR re-circulated to interested parties.

Traffic /Schools

We do not understand why elementary students from this project would be unable to attend the local elementary school on Pico Canyon Rd. However, if that is the case, the traffic must be re-evaluated. Traffic created during school drop off and pick up at Pico Elementary, added to project traffic generation as future residents leave to pick up or deliver their own children, seems not to have been considered. Also longer school commutes from this project to the Junior High and High School must be included in the Traffic, GH Gas and air quality sections.

This also creates a public safety issue as it would additionally complicate any evacuations necessitated by a fire or other emergency. Again, we believe the road infrastructure for this project is extremely unsafe for a high fire hazard area. The existence of Pico Elementary adds to this safety issue.

Biology

The mitigation for biological impacts should include impacts caused by the huge areas that must be cleared for fire hazard buffer areas around the project area.

The project proponent states he will build wetlands and move any amphibians that are found, but does not say where these manufactured wetlands will occur. It should be noted that manufactured wetlands do not have a good success rate.

The DEIR seems to depend on only two recent surveys taken in 2014 to compile the biological data. Surveys must be made during breeding or flowering season, or within a certain temperature range, etc to accurately locate the presence of various flora and fauna. It does not seem possible that adequate surveys could have been provided with only two survey dates. In our NOP comments we requested that surveys for threatened and endangered species present in the area be conducted along the blue line streams. No such surveys were conducted

Avoidance of any impacts to blue line streams is the preferable alternative, but an avoidance alternative was not included.

We concur with the comment made by the SMMC that the biological mitigation measures only address giving animals in the development footprint some warning before their habitat is destroyed, or they represent deferred mitigation with undefined mitigation sites and performance criteria. The DEIR biological mitigation measures are inadequate to compensate for the loss of 66 acres of habitat in the Santa Clarita Woodlands area. The protection of the open space is valuable but, it does not offset the direct permanent impacts to at least 66 acres of habitat.

Conclusion

The DEIR fails to include many approved but unbuilt projects located in the SCV in its cumulative analysis projects and the water supply section is totally inadequate.

We therefore ask that the Regional Planning Department require the developer to provide an adequate disclosure of these issues and re-circulate the document when this information is provided. We also request that an alternative which avoids the blue line streams be included in the re-circulated DEIR. It should include an application for a General Plan Amendment.

We oppose further incursions into fire hazard areas not only because of the danger to future residents, but also due to the cost of defending such residents from the likely increased occurrence of wildfires. A cost analysis for firefighting protection of this area should be included in the DEIR.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynne Plambeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

Lynne Plambeck
President