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Riverpark Lawsuit Moved to LA County

Ventura Judge OKs change of venue for challenge to the controversial development.

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A lawsuit aimed at blocking the Santa Clarita city-approved Riverpark development in Saugus has been moved from Ventura County to Los Angeles County, a process that could delay action for several weeks, an attorney said Tuesday.

"It sometimes takes an unbelievable amount of time to transfer (a suit) ... and come up to speed," said Carl Newton, Santa Clarita city attorney.

Ventura County Superior Court Judge Vincent J. O'Neill last week authorized a change of venue from Ventura County, where the suit was filed, to Los Angeles County.

The suit was filed in June by the Sierra Club, Friends of the Santa Clara River, the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Water Impact Network, charging Santa Clarita with ignoring environmental concerns in approving The Newhall Land and Farming Co.'s proposed 700-acre, 1,089-home Riverpark development north of the Santa Clara River in Saugus.

Rachel Myers, conservation program coordinator for the

Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club, said the group is "disappointed" by the venue change but is moving forward anyway.

"We hope the Los Angeles courts will be concerned about the issues," she said Tuesday.

Myers said the suit was filed in Ventura County because increased water usage and pollution in Santa Clarita will have an effect on communities further downstream on the Santa Clara River.

Newton disagreed, saying effects on Ventura County were a minor concern in the grand scheme of the development.

"Ventura County had minor contacts with the case," he said. "It's just illogical to be any other place (than Los Angeles County)."

Newton added that Los Angeles County courts have more experience than Ventura County courts with cases involving environmental impacts of developments. Within the next two weeks, he said, Santa Clarita and Newhall Land officials will meet with the plaintiffs to discuss settlement options.

Under an agreement with the city,

Newhall Land is responsible for defending the city against lawsuits relating to its developments.

Carol Maglione, a spokeswoman for Newhall Land, said the developer is wasting no time in moving forward with the project. Grading and other pre-construction activity has begun on the site.

"We're anxious to get started," she said. "The benefits this (project) will provide speak for themselves."

She said the project includes 700 acres of permanent designated open space and contributes \$25 million toward the cross-valley connector. The in-progress thoroughway will provide an eight-mile connection between state Highway 14 and Interstate 5.

Opponents of the "Riverpark parking lot," as Myers termed it, have charged it will add overcrowding and pollution to the area; they have opposed its location in a floodplain.

"We would like to see a stop to rampant sprawl development," Myers said.

"It's an issue that surpasses this city."