

Bakersfield Californian

<http://www.bakersfield.com/news/local/x169794233/Planners-give-blessing-to-Tejon-project>

Planners give blessing to Tejon project

By JAMES BURGER | Thursday, Sep 10 2009 11:17 PM

Tejon Mountain Village was blessed by the Kern County Planning Commission Thursday night in a marathon meeting.

It was not a unanimous decision. Commissioners Pete Belloumini and Leticia Perez voted against the exclusive mountain enclave.

"My concern with the project is the scale of the project," Perez said. "I can't help but feel that this isn't a plan that benefits the existing communities of Lebec and Frazier Park."

But the majority of the commissioners voiced strong support for the project.

"The Tejon Ranch people have put together an exciting project for the county," said Commissioner Chris Babcock.

Commissioner Ron Sprague echoed that, saying, "I like the development. I think it can be developed properly."

The project now goes to the Kern County Board of Supervisors for final approval.

The proposed 3,450-home project in the hills above Lebec would build on 5,082 acres of a total 26,417-acre project.

Roberta Marshall, General Manager for Tejon Mountain Village, profiled the plan for the recreation facilities, the golf courses, hotels, commercial areas and hiking and outdoor opportunities the gated community will offer residents and guests.

She also touted the efforts of the ranch to protect the California Condor, control fires, limit environmental damage and use water responsibly.

Those claims rang false for the melange of environmental groups and community speakers who opposed the project.

Adam Keats, a lawyer for opposition environmental group the Center for Biological Diversity, picked the project's claims of protection for the California Condor.

He said U.S. Fish and Wildlife has not approved the "take" permit Tejon is using to support the project and the county is required by CEQA to take responsibility for the potential impacts to the condor.

"The condor and all the wildlife on Tejon Ranch are part of the public trust. Kern County is the trustee of that public trust," Keats said. He compared the corporate greed of Wall Street "which owns this company" and the drive to develop Tejon Mountain Village for the "helicopter playboys" who will live and play there.

Shafter resident Tom Frantz took a little less polished approach.

"Future generations will curse your vote to approve this tonight," he said.

But not all voices from the general public were raised in opposition.

Some residents spoke in support — arguing in favor of everything from a better chance to buy a cheeseburger at the project's commercial center to lauding the project's beauty and environmental sensitivity.

"You now have an outstanding project before you and I urge you to approve it," said Lebec resident Bob Anderson.