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***BREAKING NEWS:* Tejon Mountain Village Wins 3-2 Vote from Planning Commission**[\[printer friendly\]](#)

**By Patric Hedlund**

BAKERSFIELD (Thursday, Sept. 10, 2009, 11:59 p.m.)—In a 3-2 vote tonight, the Kern County Planning Commission approved a motion to send the Tejon Mountain Village plan forward to the Kern County Board of Supervisors with a positive recommendation. They voted to support mitigation measures proposed by the Kern County Planning Department.

After the vote, outside of the hearing room, Tejon Ranch Company spokesperson Barry Zoeller said, "We are pleased with tonight's outcome and look forward to the hearing with the Kern County Board of Supervisors."

That hearing has been rescheduled to a special session on Monday, Oct. 5 (it was previously scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 22).

The Tejon Mountain Village, LLC proposal (a partnership between Tejon Ranch Company and DMB Associates of Scottsdale, Arizona) has been a matter of heated debate and anticipation for years in the Mountain Communities.

The LLC seeks to build 3,450 homes (including condominiums, apartments and townhouses) in a private, gated community on lots ranging from 6,700 sq. ft. to over 20 acres. They seek authorization for 160,000 sq. ft. of commercial buildings, 750 resort hotel rooms, two heliports, two 18-hole golf courses and about 320,000 sq. ft. of support space for the commercial amenities.

The development plan is to build within what was mapped by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the 1960s as "condor critical habitat" (an area considered essential for the survival of the species). In 1987 there were only about 22 California condors left in the world. Today, the most aggressive effort in history to save an endangered species has lifted the population to about 188 wild birds in California.

Because this was the only hearing on the commission's agenda this evening, opponents were able to make their case with some depth.

- Linda MacKay of Lebec and others spoke about the unique dangers of heart attack and stroke from significant air quality degradation in a mountain area "where there is already less oxygen [because of elevations above 4,000 feet]—and the air quality is worse than in downtown L.A., Burbank or Bakersfield," according to measurements conducted for a year with a state air quality monitor in the Grapevine area.
- UCLA statistician Jan de Leeuw showed a chart illustrating a dramatic increase in traffic through the Grapevine area from 1973 through 2008 and projected that by 2030 the impact would be elevated "to Santa Clarita I-5-SR 14 levels, but worse because Tejon Pass is not 10 lanes, it is only 8 lanes" and 25 percent of the Grapevine traffic is trucks.
- Mary Ann Lockhart showed maps of earthquake hazard from the Garlock Fault;
- Dee Dominguez of the Native American Heritage Commission spoke of the impact on Native American cultural sites and burial grounds.
- Eric Anderson (former president of the Mountain Communities Town Council) said he feared the compromise of the dark skies which currently make the Mountain Communities a prime tourism area for amateur astronomers.
- Doug Peters expressed concern about the volume of water pumped into Castac Lake.
- Adam Keats, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) challenged the legality of the hearing as conducted by the Kern County Planning department, and spoke about the threat to the California Condor posed by the current plans for Tejon Mountain Village. Another CBD attorney, Adam Lazar, spoke about water sufficiency. Numerous other opponents also contributed their comments.

Those who spoke in favor of the Tejon Mountain Village project during the hearing often had financial dealings with the Tejon Ranch Company or related real estate interests.

Ning Umandap, Vice President of Sales for Velur Enterprises, Inc. (based in Van Nuys) represents domestic and foreign investors, from the Philippines, Australia, Singapore and now China. In an interview, she said her company has invested in 20 acres of property one mile east of Tejon Ranch. At the hearing, she spoke in favor of the project and told the commission that Tejon Ranch's marketing website was a great tool for selling her own offerings to her clients. "We won!" She cheered as the meeting adjourned, both fists jabbing the sky above her head.

Others who spoke in favor of the project include

- All Seasons Realty co-owner Stacey Havener of the Mountain Communities Chamber of Commerce and the Mountain Shakespeare Festival (which received about \$4,000 in donations from Tejon Ranch this season);
- Richard Sheffield of Antioch Nursery (who contracts landscaping projects with Tejon Industrial Complex);
- Candace Huskey-Brown (board member of Shelter on the Hill which has received \$100,000 from Tejon Ranch);
- Bakersfield's Jim Baldwin, a member of the Kern County Board of Trade, who said that tourism in Kern County had become big business ("\$983 million two years ago, \$1.4 billion last year...and remember that Kern County's whole budget is \$1.6 billion...each man, woman and child who visits here spends \$75");

- Nick Ortiz of the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce (representing 1,400 businesses) who urged a "yes" vote;
- Lebec's Karen Jarvis, Bob Anderson and Barbara Hughes (a real estate broker) who all supported the project;
- Pine Mountain's Richard Welles, who is a commercial property manager and said of Tejon Ranch, "Everything they do is done with quality."

An additional mitigation was proposed and read into the record by planner Lorelei Oviatt, recommending that the forthcoming Dark Sky Society model ordinance to avoid light pollution be adopted for this project. She also mentioned that air quality concerns had been addressed with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (to whom Tejon Ranch Company gifted \$10 million last summer to reduce emissions in the San Joaquin Valley—although no agreement was made to concentrate the funds on the Grapevine's growing problems).

Laer Pearce, publicist for Tejon Mountain Village, LLC, summarized the results of the hearing afterward: "There was a 3-2 vote, but those two were 'soft no's'. Both of them complimented the project. We are glad that the planning commission did this for us."

A member of the TriCounty Watchdogs (a group of Mountain Community residents who criticized many aspects of the proposed project) said, "We're all elated." Katherine King explained, "The vote went against us, but we were thrilled that at least two of [the commissioners] listened to what we had to say."

King had reminded commissioners of the hurdles posed by the "Ranchwide Agreement" contract announced with much fanfare at a May 2008 press conference. Five environmental groups told of hatching an agreement with Tejon Ranch after 18 months of secret talks. TRC agreed to place a substantial number of acres into a conservancy. In exchange, the groups vowed not to join legal action to block Tejon's development and agreed not to appear at public hearings such as the one tonight to speak out in opposition to TRC's development plans.

King said she resigned from the Sierra Club because of this agreement. She wanted to emphasize to the commission that the conservation groups were not "given" much of the land that was purportedly conserved, but must *purchase*, "at fair market value appraisals," 62,000 acres of conservation easements by 2014. She said she was worried that if the money is not raised, "in these challenging economic times," that the land could be used for additional development.

Commissioner Belluomini asked the county planning staff to address that issue. Division Chief Lorelei Oviatt said the land is currently used primarily for grazing and that any other use would need to go through a permitting process. Belluomini voted against the project, saying he could see both sides but felt that a smaller project would be preferable.

Commissioner Perez said she loves the pristine "and unique" quality of the Mountain Communities region: "Much money has been spent to produce an eco-friendly and wise development; the applicant should be commended. My concern is the scale of the project...with hotels and spas.... It is not a plan that benefits the pre-existing communities of Lebec and Frazier Park.... It is a project that will permanently alter this natural and pristine environment that I

personally love."

Perez also said of the conflicting testimony in regard to the endangered California condor and other issues, "I'm not a scientist. I am a lawyer. Science is not perfect. I don't want to risk this area of Kern County with a project of this size. I cannot support the project."

The three commissioners who voted for the project disclosed in advance of the hearing that they had received visits and information from lobbyists for Tejon Mountain Village.

[updated Friday, Sept. 11, 2009 at 2:15 a.m., 4:26 a.m., 9 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.]

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