

Letter: County should listen to Meyers residents

Publisher's note: *This letter was first sent to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on May 21, 2014.*

Dear Chair Santiago and members of the Board of Supervisors:

I am writing to you on behalf of California's South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce (California Chamber) board President George Alm and the board of directors as a follow-up to my letter of May 2, 2014.

A meeting was held May 19 from 3pm to 5:10pm between me and five Meyers area residents and your Principal Planner Brendan Ferry at the county's South Lake Tahoe office on Emerald Bay Road. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the content of the May 2, 2014, letter and other related issues to planning in Meyers.

On behalf of the Meyers area contingent, I want to thank Brendan Ferry for taking time to meet and listen to our concerns and discuss the planning efforts to date. We all know that this planning effort has had challenges. We know as well that challenges can lead to opportunities for a successful outcome. We acknowledge that efforts are being made to make the planning process more inclusive. The Meyers area residents who attended (the May 21) meeting and our chamber board are committed to working with the county of El Dorado and TRPA officials to arrive at a plan that is acceptable to the community.

It is clear that a notable portion of the Meyers community has only recently began to understand the significance of the emerging new Area Plan and TRPA's land use changes from the Regional Plan update. Many current residents and business owners and operators have heard great concern and confusion

expressed by their community members. This condition creates a greater opportunity to ensure that the new Meyers Area Plan works for the community because community members are now more aware of and anxious to engage the planning process.

The product of our discussions (May 21) was acknowledgement that there is a great diversity of opinion regarding how residents, property owners, and business owners and operators view the future of Meyers as well as great confusion and lack of understanding of proposed land-use changes. This diversity of opinion about the future is in itself the core condition that must be assessed and evaluated in a manner that helps County officials to arrive at a verifiable and democratically-based decision on land use and restores faith that the entire community has had its voice heard.

Issue, concerns, and suggestions

The May 2, 2014, letter highlighted a number of issues and concerns of Meyers' residents, and I will not repeat them here. I am highlighting issues that are reinforced by (the May 21) conversation and offer a community-based perspective on them.

1. A verifiable method for the county to determine that it has gained a wide range view of the proposed Meyers Area Plan. A "validated" communitywide survey of all residents and property owners is needed to guide and shape the final Meyers Area Plan. Such a survey would allow all interested parties in Meyers to have a voice in this 20-year plan. It would also provide the opportunity for all community voices to be heard. This request has been made in the past and is reiterated herein.

2. Defer any final action on the plan until a new county supervisor is elected and seated to allow him or her input on the new 20-year plan. The voters of the 5th District will

elect a new supervisor in November and the man or woman elected should have an opportunity to be heard and decide on a final area plan. I am told and believe that all candidates for county supervisor for the 5th District support this suggestion.

3. Verification in the plan document that available incentives provided under the plan will be applicable to existing business and property owners. We understand that that changes to the draft (but not yet public) plan have been made to do so, and we are anxious to see specific language in this regard.

4. Specifically define height limitations in all planning areas. There should be a specific height standard written in the plan for all land uses leaving no room for creative interpretation of the plan.

5. Define clearly what criteria will be used and by whom to grant variances to building standards including height restrictions if variances are permitted under the plan.

6. Affirm in writing verbal assurances made by staff to make available to all existing business and property owners incentive allowed under an Area Plan.

7. Eliminate mixed land use additions to the plan that could compromise existing business uses (e.g. motel next to an industrial use). Do not allow the creation of uses near existing businesses that compromise the ability of owners to conduct their businesses. I am told that there is great interest in the community to maintain land uses under the 1993 Community Plan or some iteration thereof. Existing Meyers business owners and operators need to be carefully consulted so that land use decisions are clear and in line with the interests of Meyers' business owners and operators and residents.

8. Ensure in language of the plan that all existing business

will be permitted uses in any new plan adopted and that the owners of the businesses can sell their property for the same use to a subsequent owner.

9. Include in specific language of the plan that the County does not support and will not use of eminent domain (acquisition of private property over the objection of the property owner) to achieve plan goals and objectives nor will the county support the use of this extraordinary confiscatory power by other agencies.

10. Define in the plan that county and TRPA officials must carefully explore with Caltrans alternative ways to ensure safe passage of pedestrians and cyclists across Highway 50 including installation of a traffic signal. Options for safe passage must then be reviewed with the Meyers community to ensure that they are acceptable.

11. Maintain community character while striving for community improvements. Community members do not oppose new development in Meyers. They do want to retain the rural character of the community.

12. Write the language of the plan in plain English, not "planners speak." Make the document user-friendly and informative.

13. Determine if the California Tahoe Conservancy is still willing to leave existing CTC-owned parcels vacant for community open space if Meyers residents want this to happen. I am told that this was a promise made earlier in the planning process.

14. Let the people of Meyers decide their future. Comments have been made to Meyers' owners and operators over the course of the current planning process by certain policy makers and planners that Meyers should be changed and allowed to develop like "cities" in Europe living and working in a "Pack & Stack" world. Meyers is of course not a city. This "Pack & Stack"

notion and "European" future scenario needs to be tested against what the people who live and work there think and want. It is the people of the community's future that is being planned, and they need the ultimate say in the decision. The Board of Supervisors needs to hear from the community in a verifiable and inclusive way before making changes that impacts them.

Thank you all for taking time to read and consider the comments made in this letter. All of us appreciate the time and effort you make to serve us and our county. The California South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Board remains ready to assist you, the Meyers community and our friends at TRPA to ensure a successful outcome. Copies of this letter will be sent to the members of the TRPA Governing Board and interested parties.

Sincerely,

Dave Jinkens, chamber board member and government affairs liaison volunteer