

Opinion: Public needs to be a voice in Squaw's plans

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By Tom Mooers

Denver-based KSL Capital Partners purchased Squaw Valley in 2010, and is now pursuing a sweeping set of entitlements that would remake the region with development of a size, scale and scope Tahoe has never seen.

Their current proposal, known as the Squaw Valley Village Specific Plan, includes a series of high-rise hotels and condo projects with more than 1,500 new bedrooms and a massive indoor amusement park as wide as a Walmart and 10 stories tall, with waterslides, fake rivers, arcades and simulated skydiving.

All told, the project would be so big it would take 25 years of day and night construction to complete.

Placer County decision-makers need to know how you feel about it.

State planning law – the California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA – requires thorough environmental review of large development proposals.

In May, Placer County released its initial assessment, known as a draft environmental impact report, designed to encourage public scrutiny and citizen involvement. The draft EIR for the proposed Squaw Valley development runs more than 2,000 pages and assesses the project's potential impacts on everything from water quality to climate change. It's available online.

Even a quick read makes it clear that KSL's proposed

development would transform Squaw Valley into a noisy, urbanized place. In the terminology of the Draft EIR, proposed development would have “significant” and “unavoidable” impacts on Squaw Valley – and beyond. For example:

Traffic: According to the document, development would add to area traffic and “exacerbate unacceptable operations” on Squaw Valley Road, on Highway 89 in Tahoe City, in Truckee and in between.

Views: To Squaw’s iconic mountain scenery, the project would make a “substantial contribution to the cumulative degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings” with a “significant and unavoidable impact on scenic vistas.”

Noise: The project would generate noise louder than “applicable Placer County noise standards,” especially for the 25 years it would be under construction – even at night.

Equally remarkable is the information and impacts not included in the draft EIR. For example, assessment of local water supplies is based on a study that does not include records from the current, record-breaking drought.

Fortunately, CEQA is designed to encourage public involvement. This is where you come in.

The idea is that decision-makers, in this case the Placer County Board of Supervisors, need to hear from their constituents and avoid making decisions that might be prove harmful in the long run.

The primary method of communicating that reaction is known as a comment letter. And, although the process can seem quite complicated, the most important point is quite simple: Anyone can write a letter. You can write something technical – maybe a detailed review and recalculation of the peak time projections for traffic in Tahoe City. Or you can write something deep: I want to see the stars at night. Or something

clear: Deny this development application and ask KSL to submit a reasonable proposal.

With so much at stake, it should be easy to figure out what's important to you – and to share it.

Send your comments to: Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, Attention: Maywan Krach, 3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190, Auburn, CA 95603

Squaw, Tahoe and our Sierra are counting on us. It's time to stand up. Or, at least, sit down and write a letter.

Feel free to contact us with any questions, by phone at 530.265.2849 or by email at isilverman@sierrawatch.org. And you can sign up online; we'll keep you posted.

Tom Mooers is executive director of Sierra Watch.