

Opinion: The truth about Squaw's plans

By Andy Wirth

There are rare circumstances whereby we as a society are OK with people misstating the truth. One of those circumstances, for instance, includes fishing stories that may go something like this: "We landed a big one over by Horseshoe Bar, but he got away."

It is not, however, acceptable when one deviates from the truth on topics as important as the proposed development plans at Squaw Valley.



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Sierra Watch has once again chosen to deviate from the truth and is purposefully misleading the public with its op-ed. I submit that we should hold Sierra Watch accountable to the truth.

Moreover, as Sierra Watch directly supports the faltering Incorporate Olympic Valley effort (who confusingly has recently flip-flopped and are suggesting that they are now pro-development), they once again find themselves out on a limb of mistruths – all of which are meant to mislead the residents of Placer County.

To clarify the facts related to the Sierra Watch op-ed:

1. The company seeking the development permit is not KSL Capital Partners and Sierra Watch was advised of this fact multiple times. The applicant has always been Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, the parent company and operators of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows.

We are seeking to secure permission to develop a number of condominiums over the next 25 years that is consistent with the past 25 years' worth of development.

Importantly, these plans complement our efforts to compete in a hyper-competitive Western United States tourism and mountain recreation market.

While we are exceedingly proud of what Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows provide from a skiing and riding perspective, we have a lack of quality and variety of lodging offerings – something proven by way of extensive guest research along with our daily experience in operating these great, world-class mountains.

2. Sierra Watch goes on to state: "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 Wal-Mart and 10 stories tall."

This statement is simply not true. There is not one – not one – 10-story-tall building in the proposal, nor is there anything proposed that would appear to anyone in the world to look anything like a Wal-Mart, or an "indoor amusement park."

3. Sierra Watch further states: "All told, the project would be so big it would take 25 years of day and night construction to complete."

My company is seeking Placer County's approval of permission to develop residential units, all of which – and this is critical to understand – are subject to market forces and demand. Hence, the project is being proposed in multiple

phases over an extended period of time (approximately 25 years). There is not a single scenario that contains "25 years of day and night construction."

In every way, Sierra Watch's statement is patently false and purposefully stated in a manner so as to mislead and elicit fear.

Sierra Watch goes on in their op-ed to elicit input from the public on this matter. This is the only item upon which we agree.

The material difference is that my team and I have spent the past three years meeting with every homeowners association, neighbor and customer in what has been (objectively) characterized as an unprecedented amount of community outreach.

We've hosted and attended well in excess of 340 meetings and, in tuning in carefully to those who provide constructive feedback, have implemented vast, almost countless changes to the plan since its original inception over three and a half years ago.

We continue to listen, as my company will never turn a deaf ear to a good idea.

It is simply wrong to suggest that our plan, in its current form, represents anything but the inclusion of extensive and exhaustive input from the community. We feel strongly, and believe that our community's input has in fact made it a better plan.

So, Placer County – elected officials and citizens – as long as it's not a fishing tale, please, let's all hold Tom Mooers and Sierra Watch to the truth.

Andy Wirth is president and CEO of Squaw Valley Ski Holdings.