

Opinion: Time to stop Martis Valley West

By Ellie Waller

The community continues to deliver the message that they are unwilling to accept the Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan project as currently proposed.

But will the Placer County Planning Commission approve the project on June 9 anyway? Probably, unless we all stand up.

This is not the first time the community has resisted the plan. For more than three years, the community has consistently opposed efforts from East West Partners (now Mountainside Partners) to disturb 11 million square feet of soil on the ridge line.

Now, the 550-unit Brockway Campground is being proposed in the Lake Tahoe Basin as a separate project, although located immediately adjacent to Martis Valley West, and the impacts from both will be cumulative. Traffic and fire evacuation impacts, especially during peak hours, are some of the biggest concerns.

At the May 12 North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council meeting, NTRAC members were asked to make a recommendation to the Placer County Planning Commission for an upcoming June 9 hearing. Staff summarized the impacts and alternatives. Notably; when Alternative 1 (no project) was mentioned, the audience applauded wildly.

NTRAC questions/comments included:

- There are many Significant & Unavoidable impacts.
- Nine days is NOT enough time to review the Final EIR – therefore it is too soon to make a recommendation.

- Last time, NTRAC specifically requested visual simulations be brought to the next meeting; however, the applicant had not done so.
- Emergency evacuation – what are the nuts and bolts of how SR267 will handle traffic in emergency situations? (The applicant's response was basically it's Caltrans' problem, not theirs.)
- Concerns about night lighting impacts to Tahoe basin.
- Affordable/workforce housing solution simply sets aside land for someone else to (maybe) propose workforce housing in the future: This does not guarantee workforce housing getting built.

Numerous motions were made by NTRAC. Finally, they approved “a motion to recommend the Planning Commission postpone their action on this item for 30 days to allow for ample time to review the final EIR. Further, that the Planning Commission be aware there are significant concerns with the project whether development is on the east or west side of Highway 267, as noted in tonight's NTRAC meeting.”

Sierra Watch and Mountain Area Preservation representatives have said that with Brockway Campground included, the proposed project went far beyond what they agreed to in the Martis Valley Opportunity Agreement (MVOA) and pointed out it would be irresponsible to make decisions at such a fast pace on projects that will span generations. They noted that these decisions will “outlive us all”, and we shouldn't rush this.

Modifying new Alternative 5 (418 units on 200 acres on the east side of Highway 267) by adding a conservation easement on the balance of the 6,100 acres would without a doubt eliminate any potential for Tahoe night sky light impacts and scenic violation impacts because it will not be located on a shared Tahoe basin ridge line, and there would be no recreational conflict to the Tahoe Rim Trail users.

The alternative would eliminate the sprawl of the current

preferred alternative (418 units on 660 acres on the west side of Highway 267) and reduce traffic impacts by reducing the number of units by 45 percent.

Lastly, a majority of the public, agency and organization comments on the draft EIR requested changes in the FEIR to sufficiently examine the project's impacts and possible ways to mitigate them. In most cases, these comments were ignored or insufficiently and unsatisfactorily addressed.

If this sounds familiar, it might be because a very similar situation is occurring with another large area development in Squaw Valley. Two things can be gleaned from these recent meetings:

1. We can still make a difference when we all speak up.
2. The developer will have a hard time selling any claims that the public supports these projects.

In closing, save the date, June 9, location and time to follow, for the tentatively proposed hearing before the Placer County Planning Commission on the Martis Valley West project – be there for Lake Tahoe.

Shame on Placer County for scheduling the Planning Commission meeting on high school graduation day. Many people have family coming to town, others will need to leave town to be with families.

I asked to have the meeting postponed to no avail.

Ellie Waller is a Tahoe Vista resident.