

Mega-development in Martis Valley approved

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – A 6.6-acre ridgeline parcel bordering the Lake Tahoe Basin is going to one day have 760 units built on it.

In approving the project on a 4-1 vote Tuesday, the Placer County Board of Supervisors did not take the recommendation of the **Planning Commission**, which in July denied the project on a 5-2 vote. Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery was the dissenting vote Sept. 13 on the multiple issues related to the project.

Mountainside Partners of Truckee, the developer, and landowner Sierra Pacific Industries have been working on this project for at least 10 years. Build out is expected to take 20 years.

Known as Martis Valley West, the project has been controversial because it takes undeveloped land in Truckee that borders Lake Tahoe and turns it into a subdivision for second homeowners. The proponents have said they expect 20 percent or less full-time occupancy.

Montgomery voted no because she said the project goes against all the policies the county has been adopting, which call for any new project to be next to existing development. She was also disappointed that the original plan to connect the project to Northstar ski resort has been scrapped.

She was not alone in her opposition. Of the 60 people who spoke, 43 were against the project, 16 for it and one didn't take a side. Hundreds of people filled the North Tahoe Events Center for the all-day meeting that ended at 5:30pm – it started at 9:45am.

“A vote today for this project would be a vote against Lake

Tahoe," Shannon Eckmeyer with the League to Save Lake Tahoe told the supervisors.

While the project is completely outside of the basin, it was acknowledged that it will impact the region at least in terms of traffic. Those vehicles in turn affect air quality and lake clarity.

Traffic congestion on Highway 267 is already problematic. People worry this project will make it even worse. And if the area needs to evacuate, residents wonder how that will happen without the loss of life if the roads are clogged and options to escape are limited.

Transportation consultant Gordon Shaw said the increase in time to get places because of the new residences would be negligible. What might help speed the flow is if Caltrans makes this a four-lane highway, which is on the books – but without funding or a timetable.

Opponents don't believe enough study was done on the cumulative effects of projects already approved. Proponents say there was plenty of review.

While the threat of a lawsuit was broached, it was acknowledged making decisions based on potential litigation is no way to run a county. County counsel has said the environmental document is sound and is not worried that the Attorney General's Office said otherwise. This was the same stance when the AG weighed in on the Squaw Valley plan and the county did the opposite of what the state's top lawyer said.

Placer supes believe the environmental gains will trump any flaws in the plans. They opted to trust staff and what's in the environmental document.

The community plan allows for 1,360 units, nothing allocated for conservation and no recreation trails. The developer's proposed 760 units – with another 600 being permanently

retired, 6,376 acres preserved and 40 acres of trails are what sold the electeds.

The proponents in the last few months also agreed to up their workforce housing contribution. Originally they wanted to pay a mitigation fee. They conceded to build 47 units on the property. This would represent the midpoint between the minimum and maximum number of people working there. They also agreed to pay for another five units at \$117,000 each as an additional mitigation fee. Placer County could use that money for housing elsewhere.