

Suit against Placer County regarding Squaw moves forward

By Lake Tahoe News

Both sides in the legal battle involving the proposed development at Squaw Valley are saying a court ruling this week benefits them.

Sierra Watch filed a lawsuit last fall against Placer County contending CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, and the state's open meeting law – the Brown Act – were violated.

“[The] decision is good news for everyone who wants to ensure the integrity of the public process and ultimately to provide reasonable limits on development in Tahoe and to Keep Squaw True,” Isaac Silverman, Sierra Watch attorney, said in a statement. “The Brown Act might not force Placer County to make responsible choices for Tahoe, but it does require that if they are going to make bad choices that harm the lake, they have to do it in the open, in the plain light of a public hearing.”

Clayton Cook, deputy county counsel for Placer County, told *Lake Tahoe News*, “The court's ruling was in response to a motion filed by Placer County, in which the county requested that the court dismiss the claims by Sierra Watch. The court granted part of our request – but denied another part, stating that the issue at hand is a factual dispute that needs to be resolved after discovery has been conducted. This court ruling simply means that some of the allegations will require additional proceedings before the court determines the matter. It does not affect the project in question. Placer County stands by its position that it did not violate the provisions of the Brown Act and we will continue to vigorously defend our actions in court.”

Squaw Valley has been granted approval by all regulatory bodies to overhaul the base area in what will be a \$1 billion, 30-year project that includes 1,493 new bedrooms and a 90,000-square-foot indoor water park.

Sierra Watch alleges that county staff gave documents to the Board of Supervisors less than 72 hours before the public meeting that weren't simultaneously made available to the public.

"The fact is, there was no Brown Act violation. The development agreement was on the agenda, and the DA was publicly available to anyone who wanted to review it. What is rather striking is that Sierra Watch would attack a voluntary commitment to pay an air quality fee of \$441,000 to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency," Whit Manley, environmental attorney at Remy Moose Manley, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He is representing Squaw Valley Ski Holdings. "If Sierra Watch's claim is designed to intimidate the county, we doubt it will work. The county has very able planning and legal staff, and we are sure they will provide a thoughtful response to this misinformed claim."

Sierra Watch plans to amend its complaint in the next few weeks.

It could be years before the CEQA aspect of the case is resolved.