

Trial date set in case against Squaw Valley

By Kathryn Reed

A jury next year could decide if Placer County violated the state open meeting law and if there was a secret agreement with Squaw Valley Ski Holdings that involved the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

A Placer County judge last week ruled that there is enough evidence for the case to go forward. The trial is slated to start in March.

Sierra Watch filed the **lawsuit earlier this year** after the Board of Supervisors in November 2016 approved a large-scale development project that would transform the base area of the ski resort.

The lawsuit alleges 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. This would be a violation of the Brown Act.

The other allegation is that the county failed to give notice in the agenda for its November hearing that the Board of Supervisors would be considering the deal, detailed in those very same documents, to avoid litigation by the attorney general over impacts to Lake Tahoe as part of the proposed project's development agreement. This, too, would violate the Brown Act.

If Sierra Watch prevails, Placer County could be required to rescind the November approvals and conduct a new public hearing on the proposed development.

(Squaw's parent company, Denver-based KSL Capital Partners,

plans to spend \$1 billion over 25 years to build more than 1,000 residential units, hotels, retail, restaurants and bars, and an indoor adventure center.)

“Sierra Watch continues to mislead the courts, the public and spread untruths about the Village at Squaw Valley redevelopment project and the public process that led to its approval,” Whit Manley, environmental attorney at Remy Moose Manley who is representing Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, said in a statement. “When this case goes to trial, Sierra Watch will be required to produce facts that would prove there was some sort of ‘secret agreement’ Placer County was a party to when it publicly noticed the Board of Supervisors’ hearing agenda. To that we say: ‘bring it on.’ We’re confident Sierra Watch’s deliberate and calculated misstatement of facts will ultimately be exposed through the trial process.”

Squaw Valley’s contention is that the \$440,000 it gave to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was to protect Lake Tahoe’s water quality; and that it did so voluntarily.

“It’s sad to see a self-described environmental group use legal maneuvers to delay and ultimately try to take away close to \$500,000 of voluntary funding that would be used to protect Lake Tahoe’s pristine, clear waters,” Manley said.

To that statement, Tom Mooers with Sierra Watch said if Squaw’s intentions were so altruistic, write another check today.

“The issue of Tahoe’s clarity deserves more than a backroom deal,” Mooers said in a statement. “It deserves a fair hearing. Placer County’s approvals threaten everything we love about Tahoe. And they were in clear violation of state law.”

Sierra Watch had filed a separate lawsuit seeking to overturn Placer County’s approvals based on violations of the California Environmental Quality Act.