



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS

November 10, 2014

Fred Hansson, Chair and
Members of the Planning Commission
County of San Mateo
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: Item #1 on the November 12, 2014 Agenda: Big Wave Project

Dear Chair Hansson and Commissioners,

I have an unavoidable conflict on November 12, and therefore cannot be at your meeting regarding the above-referenced Project.

On behalf of Committee for Green Foothills (CGF), I respectfully request that you:

- (1) Continue the public hearing on this item, and
- (2) Require that the Project be revised to be consistent with the North Project Alternative (“NPA”) that was submitted by the Applicant and evaluated under CEQA in the July, 2014 EIR Addendum.

CGF does NOT support the Staff Recommendation, which inexplicably would reduce the number of buildings within the Office Park from five as submitted by the Applicant in the “NPA” (now confusingly described in the Staff Report as the “Revised NPA”), to three, much larger buildings. Nor does CGF support the Staff Recommendation that would reduce the Wellness Center buildings from four as submitted by the Applicant in the “NPA” to one exceedingly large building as described as the “Revised NPA”. CGF also supports additional revisions per the Coastside Design Review Committee (CDRC) to building design, parking lot layout, courtyards, building height variation, and maintaining view corridors that are included as Condition 88. Revised plans should be submitted for your review and approval, so the members of the public as well as you, as the primary decision-makers, will have a clear, complete, and accurate project description, site plan, Vesting Tentative Map, and elevations of buildings.

Background

As some Commissioner members are aware, after the County Board of Supervisors (March 2011) approved the Big Wave “2010 Project”, CGF challenged the County’s certification of the EIR in San Mateo County Superior Court. Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) and Granada Sanitary District (GSD) filed separate challenges to the County’s EIR certification. CGF and Surfrider Foundation, Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter, League for Coastside Protection, and Pillar Ridge Homeowners Association also appealed the County’s approval of the Project’s Coastal Development Permit (CDP) to the California Coastal Commission. GSD filed a separate Appeal of the CDP approval to the Coastal Commission.

In August, 2012, the Coastal Commission, in a unanimous 12-0 vote, upheld the Appeals and denied the Coastal Development Permit. However, the Commissioners and staff repeatedly stated they felt there was an “approvable project” on this site. The Commission’s Findings for Denial listed changes in the project that would bring it into conformity with the Local Coastal Program.

CGF subsequently spent a great deal of time in CEQA settlement discussions with the Big Wave representatives working on an alternative project proposal, which ultimately resulted in the North Project Alternative (“NPA”). CGF was reasonably satisfied that the NPA would address the Coastal Commission’s Findings for Denial, with additional careful attention to the many details that are inherent in a project with this level of complexity. In October 2013, CGF dismissed its CEQA litigation. A week later, Big Wave submitted the NPA to the County. CGF continued to work with the Big Wave representatives to refine details of the project. The County determined the Application complete on May 29, 2014, and circulated an EIR Addendum on July 31, 2014.

The Project Description in the Notice of Availability included the following: “The north parcel (APN 047-311-060) would be subdivided into seven lots (Lots 1-7). Lot 1 includes the common areas (wetlands, wetland buffers, fire trail). Lots 2 through 6 would contain one industrial/office/storage building on each lot. Lot 7 includes the four-building Wellness Center.

Baffling changes to Project:

CGF was therefore surprised, chagrined, and frankly baffled to see that after the third meeting of the Coastsides Design Review Committee, the project description had morphed dramatically. Instead of a total of nine buildings on the North Parcel per the “NPA”, there were suddenly only four. Without any commensurate reduction in square footage overall, this dramatic change resulted in much larger buildings, which due to their increased mass and bulk, rendered them greatly out of scale with other buildings in the vicinity.

The single Wellness Center building in this revision would be 360 feet long and 215 feet wide – with a total footprint of nearly two acres. Its two-story continuous wall stretching for longer than a typical city block — only 30 feet from the property line— would effectively wall off the southeast side of the neighboring community of Pillar Ridge.

The three buildings of the Office Park would be similarly out of scale with buildings in the vicinity. These changes would result in both the Office Park and Wellness Center buildings being severely out of compliance with LCP Policies including:

* LCP Policy 3.13 Maintenance of Community Character: requires that new development providing significant housing opportunities for low and moderate income persons contribute to maintaining a sense of community character by being of compatible scale, size, and design.

* The Community Design Manual: “Structures should relate in size and scale to adjacent buildings and to the neighborhood in which they are located.”

Permit Streamlining Act

CGF is informed that Planning Staff repeatedly advised the CDRC that they must take action by November 3 due to the Permit Streamlining Act (“PSA”). Planning staff further stated to CGF that their understanding of the PSA was that within 180 days of the Application being deemed complete, the County must take action to approve or deny the project. This is incorrect. The PSA requires that within 180 days of certification of an EIR, the public agency must approve or deny the project. In this case, the CEQA document is an Addendum to the EIR. The Addendum has not yet been certified, and therefore the PSA “clock” has not started.

Revised Project that conforms with the NPA

Attached is a Revised Project Site Plan, titled “**Eight Building Option**”, that has been kindly provided by the Applicant’s Engineer. This Site Plan, with three (or possibly four) buildings for the Wellness Center and five buildings for the Office Park layout, is reasonably consistent with the submitted NPA (which the EIR Addendum evaluated) while addressing many of the suggestions of the CDRC. Most importantly, the “**Eight Building Option**” will reduce the mass and bulk of the buildings overall. It would be desirable to have further reductions in square footage, as the MCC has pointed out, and adjustments need to be made to this option to maintain the 150-foot wetlands buffer.

Please take the time to get it right!

This is the largest project that has ever been proposed for the unincorporated Mid-Coast area. There are multiple planning, zoning, transportation, and policy issues that your Commission must consider. These include: size and scale of project overall, difficulty of access to the site from Cypress/Highway One and Capistrano Road/Prospect and timing of improvements to these key intersections/chokepoints, whether limits on parking spaces can be used as the enforceable restriction(s) on industrial/office/storage/uses, landscaping/screening of buildings, and as yet unresolved details of building design.

CGF appreciates that the Applicant has spent many years pursuing approval of this Project. However, now is not the time to force a rushed decision. The first step forward should be for your Commission to discard the “Revised NPA” that precipitously appeared out of left field and at the last minute.

Please send this back to the staff for revisions. The “**Eight Building Option**” should be the basis of further refinements per the recommendations of the CDRC contained in Condition 88. It will serve the Applicant’s interests as well as the public’s to have a clear, complete, and accurate Project Description, Site Plan, Vesting Tentative Map, and elevations of buildings based on this Option.

Thank you very much for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Lennie Roberts, San Mateo County Legislative Advocate
Committee for Green Foothills

Cc: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
Heather Hardy, Secretary, Planning Commission
Steve Monowitz, Acting Community Development Director
Camille Leung, Project Planner
Scott Holmes, Big Wave Project Engineer
Jeannine Manna, District Supervisor, California Coastal Commission
Dan Carl, Deputy Director, North Central District, CCC
Nancy Cave, District Manager, North Central District, CCC
Lisa Ketcham, Chair, Midcoast Community Council
Greg Sarab, Chair, Coastside Design Review Committee
Other interested parties