

PRESS RELEASE

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COUNTY TAKES STEPS TO RESCIND A GIVEAWAY AT NAPLES

Santa Barbara, CA – Today the Board of Supervisors initiated the rescission of two ill-conceived development agreements for the Santa Barbara Ranch Project at Naples. The Board also took steps to facilitate Coastal Commission review of the Project and restated its own commitment to reviewing Naples related issues with a wide lens and an open mind.

Exactly one year ago, Orange County developer Matt Osgood obtained approval from the County to develop a 71 unit luxury residential development on a portion of the Gaviota Coast known as Naples. In addition to approving a subdivision and other entitlements for the controversial project, the former Board of Supervisors approved two “Development Agreements”, which are contracts between the County and the developer that lock in the approvals and prevent the County from changing the law or rules applying to the project. Today, the current Board introduced an ordinance rescinding the development agreements, and took an important step toward protecting the County’s interests and ability to respond to changed circumstances.

Third District Supervisor Doreen Farr had asked County staff to evaluate the potential for canceling the development agreements at a hearing in June. Supervisor Farr’s request followed the developer’s unusual action in February of rejecting some, but not all, of the project approvals, and threatening to develop the coastal portion of Santa Barbara Ranch at much higher densities than the approved project.

“The developer’s February action created enormous uncertainty about how Naples will be developed, and demonstrates that the developer has no plans to deliver the few purported public benefits associated with the project” said Ana Citrin, an attorney for the Naples Coalition. “By rescinding the development agreements the Board ensures they can respond appropriately to these changing circumstances” Citrin said.

Greg Helms, Naples Coalition president, indicated that he was pleased with the Board’s action. “The development agreements approved last year were a terrible deal for the County and for the public. The benefits they offered like a trail segment along the freeway were simply not worth tying the hands of future Boards of Supervisors.”

In addition to their action on the development agreements, the Board also directed Staff to further investigate the status of the project description and to then send a single revised Notice of Final Action to the Coastal Commission for review.

“It is critical that the Coastal Commission consider all of the project’s impacts comprehensively,” said Nathan Alley, attorney for the Environmental Defense Center and the Surfrider Foundation. “This project was pitched as a ‘global resolution’ to land use conflicts at Naples, and the only way to possibly achieve that is for the Coastal Commission to understand everything that is proposed to be built within its jurisdiction.”

The Board is scheduled to consider adoption of the ordinance rescinding the development agreements at the October 27, 2009, Board hearing.

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The Naples Coalition is a Santa Barbara County, CA-based association of local non-profit groups including the Gaviota Coast Conservancy, Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club, Santa Barbara Chapter of Surfrider Foundation, Santa Barbara Chapter of the Audubon Society, Citizens Planning Association of Santa Barbara County, Santa Barbara County Action Network, and the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara. The Naples Coalition is dedicated to the preservation of the rural character of the Naples property on the Gaviota coast. The Naples Coalition seeks to preserve the rural character of the Naples area from this development’s impacts.

The Environmental Defense Center protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community based organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and environmental health.

Surfrider Foundation is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the oceans, waves and beaches for all people, through conservation, activism, research and education. The Santa Barbara Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation was founded in 1990 to protect local beaches, coastal areas, and water quality.