

SUMMARY OF PLANNING COMMISSION ON THE VILLAGE AT SQUAW VALLEY

The hearing started at around 10:30 (August 11, 2016) with about 400 people attending. First up were presentations by Placer County Planning Department staff (Alex Fisch) and then 3 representatives of Squaw Valley Ski Holdings (Andy Wirth, Environmental Consultant Adrienne Graham, and lawyer Whit Manley).

The basis of SVSH's presentation was that

- 1) They want to restore Squaw Valley- Alpine as a pre-eminent destination resort, as called for in the 1983 Squaw Valley General Plan. To do that they have to correct a substantial deficit in the vacation experience in terms of the quality of lodging and variety.
- 2) They emphasized that this is, in their words, a re-development project, rather than a development project, since the land being built upon is mostly now an asphalt parking lot. They characterized existing conditions as "frozen in time."
- 3) They emphasized that the 1983 Squaw Valley General Plan allows for 4,200 bedrooms in Olympic Valley, while the plan being proposed has 1,493 bedrooms. This includes 21 fractional cabins on previously undeveloped land.
- 4) While there are 20 Severe and Unavoidable Environmental Impacts, they contend there are really only 10 since there were double counts between individual and cumulative impacts, and some of the remainder, like visual impact, are subjective, while some others, like greenhouse gas emissions, cannot be really determined since the regulations refer to a post 2020 standard. So in all, they claim, there were really only a handful, like traffic, for which the Village project is not really the main culprit. It is already horrible.

The public comment began around 2 PM. Of the 98 people who spoke, 58 were against the project, while 40 were for it. The majority of those who spoke in favor of the project worked for Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley. Public comment ended at around 8 PM. The order of public comments were inadvertently such that the opponents generally spoke first, and the proponents second. This was not planned, but due to how the sign-up was done.

Interspersed into the mix only the day before was a letter from the California Attorney General's office

<http://friendsofsv.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Attorney-General-Letter-regarding-Squaw-Valley-Village-Proposal.pdf>

that focused primarily on Lake Tahoe issues. The letter stated that the EIR incorrectly neglected to determine the Squaw Valley's impact on the Lake Tahoe Basin because Squaw Valley is outside the lake basin. The letter said "Because of the proximity of the proposed development to Lake Tahoe, we are concerned about the impacts the development will have within the Tahoe Basin". High on that concern list were green-house gases and traffic. This letter was referred to by many of the opponents in their presentation.

When the commissioners asked about this letter, County counsel, Karin Schwab) responded that they had read it, and there was nothing new in it.

Interestingly the letter also pointed out that with each new development approved outside the basin, but having a traffic impact in the basin, as the Squaw Valley project does, the traffic around the lake will be close to the TRPA set maximum threshold and that may preclude new development and redevelopment that Placer County has planned within the basin". This might be more significant to the Supervisors than it was to the Planning Commissioners.

Included in the presentations by the opponents to the project were the concerns with

- 1) Traffic – already horrible, confirmed by Stonebreaker of the CHP
- 2) Wildland fire evacuation – major issue in the denial of Martis Camp project, and no less serious here
- 3) Impacts to Shirley Canyon – major maintenance center and propane storage right next to creek; requires zoning change
- 4) Peak overnight population - county analysis of home occupation done incorrectly; population perhaps already at 12,000 limit prescribed in Squaw Valley General Plan
- 5) Inconsistency of Mountain Adventure Camp (MAC) with Squaw Valley culture – huge indoor facility in middle of one of the best outdoor recreation areas in California
- 6) Visual Obstruction – MAC is 96' tall, front and center placement in the proposed village
- 7) On-site employee housing – at 35% of new equivalent full time employees, instead of promised and required 50%; in lieu funds go to the County and do not help Tahoe area
- 8) Lack of substantial community benefits – money goes to County and districts, and benefits the Squaw community only indirectly; Community Benefit Fund requires full approval.
- 9) Water and the Squaw Valley aquifer (the WSA study) – everything based on models and no real oversight with authority; precarious analysis of severe drought

The proponents of the project included the following topics in their presentations

- 1) Magnitude of the benefits (TOT, property tax, transit payments, park & recreation amenities, community benefit fee, low income housing payments)
- 2) Results of a marketing study that said only the well-financed ski areas will survive
- 3) Make Squaw Valley great again (Squaw was 29 out of 30 in the Ski Magazine survey last year)
- 4) The project has already been downsized twice before, so the current proposal is (i) very reasonable, and (ii) rock-bottom for achieving their require return on investment
- 5) The 1983 Squaw Valley general plan calls for a destination resort.
- 6) KSL is a great company to work for

After the public comment was completed, the commissioners started asking questions. It was apparent that the commissioners did not take seriously the opponent's comments that they should (i) only focus on the project as now proposed, (ii) not consider the financial analysis, (iii) not be distracted by the money being promised, and (iv) consider impacts outside the Tahoe Basin.

Except for an attempt by Commissioner Gray to consider a 25% reduction in bedroom count and, as well , the recommendations by the SV Municipal Advisory Council (which voted to deny the project, as proposed, and consider a reduced village at 50% or less), most of the questions were pretty trivial and the planning staff had a ready answer for them all. While it seemed that there might be more questions, 4th district commissioner Moss made a motion to certify the EIR (the first of the required approvals) which was quickly seconded. That led to a vote which certified the EIR by a vote of 4-2. Approving the remaining staff recommendations

followed in turn, all with the same 4-2 vote. Voting against the motion (meaning not to approve the EIR and the VSVSP) were commissioners Wayne Nader and Mickey Gray. Interestingly commissioner Sevison, who represents the At-large East of the Sierra Crest region including Squaw Valley, voted to approve the EIR and project as proposed, while Nader, representing West of Sierra Crest, voted to not approve the motion. Strange.

The Board of Supervisors will have the final say regarding the Village at Squaw Valley project probably sometime this Fall.

