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Life and Death on the Gaviota Coast

One Saturday each month, four volunteers don CALTRANS safety vests and helmets to battle litter on the coast. Gaviota Coast Conservancy has adopted a two-mile stretch of northbound Highway 101 by Naples for cleanup. The crews have found life in the form of each year's crop of baby lizards, and death in owls, hawks and a coyote apparently all felled by vehicle strikes. The majority of the litter is in the form of beverage and fast food debris, but there is an endless variety of other finds from LP albums to cell phones to a bed frame. For a chance to join in the fun, contact Janet Koed at 683-6631.

President's Message

The Gaviota Coast is certainly a treasured local landscape, but also has regional significance as a species rich, safe-harbor for declining biodiversity. Unfortunately, much of it is for sale in the upscale, international real estate market. We are witnessing a conversion of the Gaviota Coast as we have known it, with projects at five large, historic ranches proposing to break up those ranches into smaller, less agriculturally viable ranchettes with large, luxury homes. Lot lines are being adjusted to facilitate this conversion, and parcels sold for development. Big mansions mean big taxes, which means less viable agriculture.

All over the country, residential sprawl has fragmented and eventually covered productive agricultural land, and wildlife habitat, but in coastal areas, what happens on the land also affects the sea. The Pew Oceans Commission has reported that development threatens

coastal ecosystems, and is significantly stressing the Pacific Ocean, contributing to the decline of 188 of the 286 California species listed under the Endangered Species Act. They suggest local governments use urban growth boundaries and protective zoning ordinances to protect places like the Gaviota Coast. Such policies are already in place here, but are too often overlooked or ignored by local agencies.

You will read in this newsletter how recent decisions by the new Board of Supervisors promises new hope for the Gaviota Coast. But, in the mean time, we see no reduction in the number and complexity of projects we must concurrently address. The Conservancy is working hard to protect the Gaviota Coast, but we need your on-going help to do that work. Please use the enclosed envelope to continue, or initiate, your support. Thank you.

BREAKING NEWS

Hope for enhanced local actions to protect the Gaviota Coast was increased on March 17th when the Board of Supervisors voted 4 to 1 (Gray) to place the Climate Action Plan and the Gaviota Coast as their two top long-range planning priorities. Ever since the National Park Service study found enhanced local and state management as the environmentally preferred alternative, and the cry for "local control" echoed across the County, we have been looking to see how that would manifest itself. Until now, it hasn't. And, even now it is uncertain, but the Supervisor's decision promises to finally produce some enhanced local protection through an update of the General Plan and Local Coastal Plan for Gaviota.

Pearl Chase Lives!

Santa Barbara was enriched by Pearl Chase. She was a woman of vision and influence that shaped the city as few have before or since. The open space of east beach, named Chase Palm Park in her honor, was her vision. The restoration of the Presidio proceeded because she understood that a community must honor its past. The Moreton Bay Fig Tree blooms today because she understood that the right tree was better than the wrong building.

In 1970 Jules Berman, the developer, received approval from the County Board of Supervisors to build 1,535 (1,535!) ranchettes at El Capitan. Selma Ruben thought this was outrageous. She and Anna Laura Myers organized a referendum and within 30 days collected 12,000 signatures. The Supervisors would

not reverse their decision so it was put to a vote of the people, of which 60% sided with Selma and Anna. The Gaviota Coast would have been lost forever; subdivided, paved, and overrun with strip malls without the foresight, hard work, and toughness of these two women.

Selma is 92 today, an active board member of 8 community organizations, an energetic volunteer at our events, and a role model for us all.

The Gaviota Coast exists as we know it today because the Pearl Chase of our time, Selma Rubin, saw the value of our coastal environment when all the developer could see was his bank account. What were the Supervisors seeing?

Thank you Selma!!



Selma Rubin. Photo by Phil McKenna, 2006

Naples Update

Matt Osgood of Vintage Communities has been trying for over 10 years to bring his Orange County mansions to Naples on the Gaviota Coast. Not a shovel of dirt has been turned and it's possible that none ever will. It is a very long story, but here is the current update.

On October 7th, the developer-compliant Board of Supervisors, in closed session, amended the Memorandum of Understanding between Osgood and the County, allowing Osgood to proceed with development of the inland portion of the project before the required new zone district receives final approvals. This secret decision violated the Brown Act requirement to do government business in the open. The effect of this decision was to undo years of planning for an interconnected, global solution at Naples.

Then on October 21st, the Supervisors approved the entire development at Naples. They debated for less than an hour, ignoring the fact that not a single citizen, unaffiliated with the project, testified in favor of the development during the entire 10-year planning process. The vote was 3-2, with South Coast Supervisors Carbajal and Wolf voting against it. On November 20, the Naples Coalition (of which the GCC is a founding member), EDC, and Santa Barbara Surfrider filed a lawsuit in Superior Court challenging the County's approvals on well established environmental law.

In January of this year the Naples Coalition petitioned the newly constituted Board of Supervisors (sans Brooks Firestone), under the authority of the Brown Act, to conduct the public's business in the public arena and rescind the MOU amendment. The new board agreed and set aside

the October amendment! Osgood found this unacceptable, and in an unexpected move in February withdrew from the MOU. This action has thrown calamity into a complex process, causing the County to ask for 2 months to study the impact of the action. Our position is that all of the project approvals were contingent upon a "global resolution" of the land use issues at Naples. Withdrawal from the MOU and developing the inland portion of the project before Coastal Commission approvals for the Coastal Project will unravel any global resolution, and violate numerous conditions of approval for the Inland Project.

And what does the Coastal Commission have to say? They have rejected the County's submission of project approvals three times as being incomplete, lacking major substantive detail. Stay tuned.

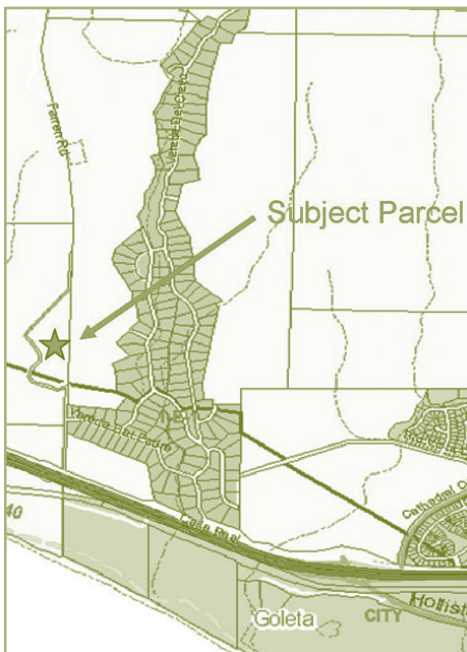
Lawsuit Challenges Approval of Massive House on Gaviota Coast



In a working, rural landscape, what constitutes a ranch house may be a matter of taste, but the modern, urban design illustrated above threatens the rural character of the Gaviota Coast. While such designs may be acceptable in the urban area, the Rural Zoning Ordinances are different and are intended to protect the rural, scenic qualities of the landscape.

This project first got our attention when not long after they bought this Farren Road property, owners Randy Welty and Lynn Ballantyne denuded all 17 acres of vegetation and erected a shiny new chain-link, boundary fence; not a good sign. Farren Road is a popular recreation area on the eastern Gaviota Coast. It's outside the urban boundary, and zoned for agriculture. Land use policies here specifically prohibit siting structures where they intrude into the sky as seen from public viewing places. Yet, this mansion is the length of a football field, and sited right on the hilltop where it intrudes into the skyline.

Despite early and consistent policy-based rejection by planning staff and



the Board of Architectural Review, the North County Planning Commissioners went out of their way to side with the applicants. Their approval included an ill-advised effort to hide this sore thumb behind a 660' long, ten-foot high mound of dirt; a concept promoted by former Supervisor Firestone. The Board of Supervisors, rejecting staff policy analysis, approved this controversial project on July 15, 2008. This is a project that policy wouldn't allow, but the politicians did.

"The Supervisor's action is a rejection of reasoned, policy-based, protection for Gaviota Coast resources," stated Gaviota Coast Conservancy President Mike Lunsford.

Supervisors Carbajal and Wolf understood how inappropriate this project was, and why it didn't deserve approval. Although outvoted, they made eloquent, compelling arguments for sending this project back for redesign and relocation on the site, as the Board of Architectural Review had twice recommended.

"The Gaviota Coast Conservancy determined that this egregious project should not stand unchallenged. In approving the Ballantyne mega-house, the County Supervisors ignored the plain requirements of their General Plan and responded to the Project's visual impacts by looking the other way. The Board of Supervisors approved this project without justification and in violation of applicable law," stated Lunsford. In an effort to restore the rule of law, the Gaviota Coast Conservancy sued the County. On April 7, the court issued its decision agreeing with the Conservancy. This project must now go back for further review.

For more information, see www.GaviotaAction.org. Please consider making a special donation to help defray the cost of sending this garish, highly visible mega-mansion back to the drawing board!

Another Orange County Developer

Markar Properties of Orange County wants to build houses on the old Arco coastal property near Eagle Canyon, but they don't have the water to do it. The Goleta Water District (GWD) agreed to annex their coastal lot more than 10 years ago but the required LAFCO approval was conditioned on Makar merging their 25 Naples Township lots, a condition which was never fulfilled. After two time extensions, the annexation request expired. No water means no development.

More recently, Makar renewed their request to GWD for annexation. GWD again approved the annexation, but improperly relied on the ten year old environmental review for the golf course project, a violation of state law. GCC and SB Surfrider filed suit, and the GWD withdrew their approval. Makar then turned to LAFCO, threatening to sue if LAFCO didn't record their previous, now expired, ten-year-old annexation approval. Surprisingly, LAFCO agreed to record the expired approval. In doing so, it failed to conduct environmental review, and allowed Makar to escape merging their 25 Naples lots; a key benefit relied on by LAFCO when they approved the annexation in the first place.

LAFCO's unusual action set up Makar to get away with a bait and switch scam; get the benefit of the earlier bargain without the burden of merger. When we were kids, we called this cheating. It's no different now. GCC and Surfrider sued LAFCO to correct this injustice. On April 14, the court agreed with us and set aside LAFCO's approval.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Join the Gaviota Coast Conservancy and help us maintain our efforts to preserve our beautiful coastline and watersheds. Please use our reply envelope and thank you!
- Consider making a donation to the Gaviota Coast Conservancy. We are a volunteer organization that relies upon public support to continue our work. We cannot defend our coastal heritage without broad based community involvement; please be generous. Many thanks!



Naples photo by George Welik, 2009

Links

Gaviota Coast Conservancy:

www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org

Naples Coalition:

www.savenaples.org

Santa Barbara Surfrider:

www.surfrider.org/santabarbara

Environmental Defense Center:

www.edcnet.org/

Santa Barbara County:

Gaviota Projects:

www.sbcountyplanning.org

from the left navigation, choose

Current Projects & Programs >

go to Cumulative Project Lists >

Gaviota Coast Current Projects List

Santa Barbara County:

Naples Project (Santa Barbara Ranch):

www..sbcountyplanning.org

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Santa Barbara Ranch

www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org

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