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El Dorado County supes back baseball over neighbors

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El Dorado County officials lauded a Cameron Park church for its willingness to develop ball fields for community use, despite protests from nearby residents that it will increase traffic and noise at the gateway to their rural neighborhood.

"I'm glad someone is willing to step up to the plate and build us a ball field," Supervisor Rusty Dupray said, noting that neither the county nor the Cameron Park Community Services District has the funds to meet demands for recreational facilities.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously approved the Light of the Hills Lutheran Church's request to build a multipurpose ball field on a 5-acre parcel south of Highway 50 at Rodeo Drive and Coach Lane, at the entrance to the Cameron Estates subdivision.

The church sought to revise a special use permit for its current complex and extend it to the adjoining parcel. Because that parcel is zoned for rural residential use, a special use permit is required for the ball field.

The board authorized the church to proceed without a restriction recommended by the county Planning Commission that use of the field be limited to church athletic activities. Church representatives said their intent is to make the fields available to organized sports groups in the community for practices and games.

Church members said the fields are intended as part of their community outreach, explaining that their facilities currently are used by numerous non-church groups for meetings and other activities.

"The point of us building the field is so the children of the community can use it," said Brian Morris, a church member and Cameron Park resident. "There's no point in building it if the children of the community can't use it."

Judy Mathat, representing the Shingle Springs-Cameron Park Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber board supported the church's undertaking. The ball field could help generate business for the nearby commercial area, which Mathat described as a little depressed.

Residents of Cameron Estates, who turned out in force to protest the project, argued that the location was not appropriate for what some termed a sports complex.

Kathie Evans noted that the local chamber also favored construction of the Indian casino at the Shingle Springs Rancheria, which the Board of Supervisors had sought to block. Cameron Estates residents oppose the ball fields for many of the same reasons the board opposed the casino, she said.

Several residents complained that county planners' conclusion that traffic from the ball field would not significantly affect the area was based on a traffic study that analyzed impacts of school, previously proposed by the church, but did not include traffic generated by a ball field that would open for public use.

But other Cameron Park residents and representatives of youth sports leagues urged the board to approve the project.

Erik Grendahl said he grew up in the community and now has children of his own who need a place to play.

"We have a need for ball parks," he said, arguing that approving a the church's offer to build and operate fields should be a "no brainer."

Board Chairwoman Helen Baumann said the decision was a difficult one for her. "I feel like I'm between a rock and a rock," she said in weighing the desires of Cameron Estates residents against the service the ball fields would provide the community.

She and fellow supervisors, however, said they believed the ball fields would serve as a buffer between the residential area and commercial development.

If the Cameron Estates subdivision were being developed today, Supervisor Jack Sweeney said, "One of the requests and one of the requirements would be a park."

The proposed site, he said, would probably be considered an ideal location.


Supervisor Dupray, who acknowledged that his family attends the Light of the Hills church, said he believed the ball field would be an asset to the neighborhood, "not some whacked out eyesore."

The board stipulated, however, that the fields are not to be lighted and use will be limited to daylight hours. Play is not to begin before 9 a.m. on Saturdays or noon on Sundays. People using the ball field also are to park in the church lot, not on adjoining streets, and public use is to be scheduled through the church.

The supervisors stressed that if the conditions are violated, the church could lose its use permit for the ball fields and adjoining facilities.

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