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Proposed development too dense, neighbors say

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A proposed development on El Dorado County's rural fringes drew the ire of several area residents who said the project would be out of place because of its density.

The developer of the proposed Summerbrook project off Green Valley Road in the Cameron Park area also said some of the proposed 29 lots will carry disclosures of potential noise from an outdoor shooting range.

Though the county Planning Commission supported the project on a 3-2 vote Feb. 14, commission member Dave Machado said it was the first time in his six years on the panel that he was aware of a developer having to disclose gunfire next door.

Several area residents spoke against the project, saying they feared that purchasers of Summerbrook's proposed 1.3-acre to 2.2-acre lots wouldn't embrace their neighbors' rural lifestyle.

Matt Gugin said he and his wife moved to the area for the rural experience. Their property includes part of the shooting range, which he said has operated for 20 years with approval of the county Sheriff's Department.

The Summerbrook project calls for 29 lots on 90 acres on the north side of Green Valley Road, about 500 feet west of the Bass Lake Road intersection.

The property is zoned for exclusive agricultural and estate residential use, requiring parcels of at least 5 or 10 acres. But the developer seeks to take advantage of provisions in the general plan that allow homes to be built in clusters on smaller lots to preserve natural features such as trees and wetlands.

In this case, the developer plans to dedicate 35 acres as open space, which also makes the project eligible for a density bonus amounting to an additional 11 homes.

"We have several projects in the pipeline that want to use the density bonus, and they're all outside community regions," planner Gina Hunter told the commission.

Community regions are areas where the county has indicated it intends to direct growth.

Neighbor Joan Sanford said she raises horses and sheep on her property. She noted that the county Agricultural Commission recommended denying the Summerbrook project, which would occupy land historically used for grazing.

She and other nearby property owners said they were concerned about children from the proposed development climbing over fences to get to a creek or to see the horses.

"I don't want to be the playground for this bunch of houses," Sanford said.

They also argued that the development would harm wildlife in the area.

"There are coyote dens on the property that will be destroyed," Gugin said.

Area residents would not oppose a project in keeping with the existing zoning, he said, but they object to rezoning the property for denser development.

Resident Bruce Malm said the project would add to traffic congestion on Green Valley Road.

Developer Brian Holloway defended the project, arguing that it would provide a good transition between higher-density neighborhoods including a middle school south of Green Valley Road and the

larger rural acreages.

Holloway said he was prepared to install fencing that children couldn't climb but that would be sensitive to wildlife.

In meetings with area residents, Holloway said he found that "some of the neighbors thought coyotes were cool, and others said, 'Please get rid of the coyotes.' "

Commissioner Machado supported the project. He argued that Green Valley Road is one of the county's few east-west collector roads and that denser development near such roads is appropriate.

Commission Chairman Alan Tolhurst, however, said, neighboring property owners had consulted the general plan and had every reason to expect a rural development with lots of at least 5 acres.

But Tolhurst and commissioner John MacCready were in the minority. Commissioners John Knight and Walter Mathews joined Machado in backing the project.

The commission's recommendation will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors, which is scheduled to consider the project at 2 p.m. March 11. The meeting will be held in the board meeting room, 330 Fair Lane, Building A, Placerville.

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