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RESIDENTS FILE LAWSUIT AGAINST COUNTY OF ORANGE AND CITY OF YORBA LINDA OVER UNSAFE HILLSIDE PROJECT

Yorba Linda Residents Cite Public Safety Concerns as Key Reason for the Complaint

Yorba Linda, CA, Thursday, July 2, 2015 — Protect Our Homes and Hills—a Yorba Linda community group comprised of concerned residents—filed a lawsuit against the County of Orange for its approval of the Esperanza Hills project. The Board of Supervisors approved the General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, and Specific Plan for the 340-unit hillside development on June 2nd. The City of Yorba Linda was also included in the lawsuit for its lack of action on the project as a Responsible Agency.

Main concerns about the project include public safety due to lack of adequate access to the project site, increased traffic on neighborhood streets, inadequate fire evacuation plans, and excessive water use. The Orange County Fire Authority testified at the June 2nd public hearing that this project would act as a buffer for older homes in the area. Residents contend no new houses or lives should ever be used as a buffer from wildfires, especially because wind driven embers can pass right over the development and still destroy older homes—as witnessed in the 2008 Freeway Complex Fire.

Residents of the new homes would still need to evacuate onto the same streets that were gridlocked in the Freeway Fire. “The number of cars utilizing the same bottlenecked streets would likely double and we already know residents could barely evacuate in 2008. Why would we make the problem worse knowing our history?,” questions Marlene Nelson, Co-Chair of Protect Our Homes And Hills.

Another concern is access. The Esperanza Hills project lacks adequate access for the number of homes proposed. In fact, land owned by the City of Yorba Linda as permanently dedicated open space and parkland would be paved over to create the “grand entrance” for this hillside project. Residents argue City and State laws must be followed in order to use this land for the preferred entrance. In 2006, Yorba Linda voters passed a “Right to Vote Amendment,” known as Measure B, that is triggered with a major change in land use. No road alignment exists there in the Circulation Element

of the City's General Plan and public property will be developed for a private residential project—both situations trigger a Measure B vote. “We believe Yorba Linda voters deserve a say in how their city is affected by these dangerous projects,” remarked Nelson.

“In a time of extreme drought,” comments Brian Gass, Co-Chair of Protect Our Homes And Hills, “the Yorba Linda Water District states it can serve these houses for 20 years. Then why do existing residents need to cut their water use back by 36%? We are told there is no water for our lawns, but this development, which is a water waster, can use two and half times as much water as the rest of us? It just doesn't add up.”

Gass continues, “It is unfortunate that we had to file a lawsuit. Common sense should have prevailed. We even offered numerous tools, options, and resources to the County and City—all of which were ignored.”

The Petition was filed in Superior Court earlier today by the group's land use attorney Kevin Johnson. Hills For Everyone, California Native Plant Society, Endangered Habitats League, and Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks are also co-petitioners in the lawsuit.

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Protect Our Homes and Hills is working to stop to poorly planned projects in the hills above Yorba Linda. The group is a project of the regional non-profit Hills For Everyone, which serves as its fiscal sponsor. Learn more at: ProtectYorbaLinda.com.