

## DEVELOPMENT

# Supervisors sign off on contentious home site plan

The vote is the third attempt at trying to build on large lots in the wooded Esperanza Hills

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Over the continued objections of residents, Orange County supervisors signed off for a third time on plans to build 340 homes in the Esperanza Hills north of Yorba Linda.

Developer Doug Wymore has been trying since 2012 to win approval to create a neighborhood of single-family homes on large lots that would abut Chino Hills State Park, and he still could face court challenges.

Residents concerned about wildfire danger, potential harm to wildlife and additional demand on roads and community services have sued twice over the adequacy of the plans and environmental reviews. They got the county's first two approvals voided.

Tuesday, about 50 people wearing red shirts with the words "Safety first" on the front turned out for a hearing on the project and reiterated warnings that a fire could sweep through the area like the Freeway Complex fire in 2008, destroying homes and potentially threatening lives.

During the 2008 fire, "residents were gridlocked three abreast" trying to evacuate homes on the east side of Yorba Linda, warned Ed Schumann, who lost his home. "Firefighters came late, if at all."

Of particular concern for the residents is that the new development would only have one way in and out for everyday use. Wymore has maintained that a second, emergency-only access to the neighborhood would be sufficient in an emergency, but residents continue to disagree. He has also noted the addition of gravity-fed fire hydrants and expanded fire-resistant landscaping to the project's plans.

HOUSING » PAGE 6

## Housing

FROM PAGE 3

"Maybe planners didn't know better in the 1980s when many of the existing homes were built, but planners should know better now," Melanie Schlotterbeck, of the local conservation group Hills for Everyone, said of the previous neighborhoods that had been allowed in the fire-prone area.

Wymore told supervisors that the residents' most recent lawsuit, which an appeals court has yet to wrap up, came down to three issues: maps showing incorrect boundaries for Chino Hills State Park, insufficient estimates of how much water the development would use, and the need to spell out specific fire protection measures in the plans. Af-

ter the meeting, he said he's "absolutely" confident he has satisfied all the court's concerns.

Supervisor Todd Spitzer said the project "just doesn't fit" the geography of the location. He cast the only dissenting vote, so it was approved 4-1 — prompting one man to call out, "See you in court!" As disappointed residents filed out of the hearing room, a red-shirted woman shouted at supervisors, "Would you put your family members in that canyon?"

An adjacent, smaller 80-home development called Cleo Vista had also brought residents out in opposition, but its developer overcame that with changes including more fire safeguards and a reduced number of homes. After seven years in the planning stages, the county approved Cleo Vista in December 2016.

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— Melanie Schlotterbeck, member of Hills for Everyone