



Testimony of Michael D. DeLapa, Executive Director, LandWatch Monterey County
Paraiso Springs Resort before the Monterey County Planning Commission

Good afternoon. Michael DeLapa, Executive Director, LandWatch Monterey County.

Why would you approve an exclusive mega-resort in a high fire hazard zone on a rural property with inadequate roads and water?

Do you remember how this project started? How in 2003 the applicant tore down 12 cottages, nine of them historic, without a permit? What message does it send to developers that they can come into Monterey County, hire a smart attorney, make some strategic friends in high places, and be rewarded with a project that should never be built?

So why would you approve a 103-room hotel, 60 timeshare units, 17 timeshare villas, a lodge, a visitor center, a spa, restaurants, a 23-parcel subdivision, the removal of 185 protected oak trees, and development on steep slopes in excess of 30% in a narrow box canyon more than a mile up a dead-end road?

What will you say when the fires come – and they will come, just like they came to Paradise and to Soberanes? What will you tell the families of the guests and the workers who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when the fire sparks and the canyon flames descend on the resort? Will you tell them that you trusted the developer and his paid consultants rather than the California Attorney General's office? That you had more insight than Bob Roper, a former Ventura County Fire Chief and Nevada State Forester with 40 years of experience in the fire service?

And what about the neighbors and long-time residents in Paraiso, who know too well about fire danger? How are they going to get to safety from the end of a box canyon on a small, twisting, two-lane road when 500 guests and 100 employees are being evacuated?

Today, you can make sure that workers in our community, your neighbors who are opposing this project, and the guests who will visit the resort oblivious to the fire risks are protected. You can also assess a sufficient penalty to deter developers from illegal activities. Please reject the after-the-fact permit and Final EIR and downsize the project so that it is no larger than the historic use and avoids any development on the steep hillsides. A smaller project is a safer project.