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October 2, 2013

Monterey County Historic Resources Review Board
c/o John Ford
168 West Alisal, 2nd Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Re: DEIR For Paraiso Springs Resort, SCH #2005061016

Dear Members of the Monterey County Historic Resources Review Board:

I write on behalf of LandWatch Monterey County regarding the proposed Historic Resources Review Board resolution regarding the Paraiso Springs Resort Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). We are concerned that while your proposed resolution identifies a serious defect in the Draft EIR – the failure to provide an adequate analysis of the Cultural Landscape – it does not propose an adequate resolution. The necessary resolution requires revision and recirculation of the Draft EIR.

A memorandum to the Historic Resources Review Board by the project planner concludes that “the Paraiso Site should be considered a Cultural Landscape which was not adequately addressed in either the ARM reports or the Painter Report.” John Ford, memorandum to Historic Resources Review Board, Oct. 3, 2010, p. 2. The Draft Resolution for the HRRB states that “[t]he work by Painter identifies that the site is not significant from a cultural standpoint relative to the Victorian era but does not address the significance of the site from the other significant periods of habitation..” Draft Resolution, p. 3. The Draft Resolution also finds that “the evaluation of the Victorian Period as the period of significance is too narrow.” Id., p. 2.

We concur with the finding that the analysis of the Cultural Landscape in the DEIR is not adequate. The EIR must be revised and recirculated to provide an adequate analysis of the Cultural Landscape with reference to all of the historic periods in which the site was inhabited. CEQA requires that the analysis of the environmental setting, including the Cultural Landscape, be sufficient to enable the public and decision makers to determine whether the project will cause or contribute to significant impacts.

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The Draft Resolution proposes that the missing analysis be supplied in part through an HRRB proposal for a revised mitigation measure 3.5-1b, which calls for development of a “historic context statement for Recreation and Leisure Resources within the unincorporated areas of Monterey County . . . [which] shall identify significant themes in the area’s historical development, identify associated property types, including cultural landscapes, with their character defining features, and establish evaluation criteria and integrity thresholds for important property types sufficient to provide a framework for evaluation [of] resources individually and as distinct contributors for the National, California, and Monterey County registration programs.” Draft Resolution, p. 3. This analysis belongs in the draft EIR. While CEQA may permit the deferral of mitigation, it does not permit the deferral of a description of the environmental setting or the deferral of the analysis of the significance of the effects of the project on that environmental setting.

Adequate analysis of the Cultural Landscape and the project’s effects on that landscape are a necessary preliminary to formulation of adequate mitigation. For example, the mitigation proposed by the DEIR and by the HRRB’s Draft Resolution does not even consider the possibility that offsite mitigation may be appropriate in light of the connection of the project to offsite resources that may be part of the Cultural Landscape, e.g., the Los Coches stagecoach stop and inn associated with use of the project site in another historic period. Indeed, the memorandum to the Historic Resources Review Board by the project planner prematurely concludes that “mitigation must be related to the loss of the structures and cannot be used for other projects, programs or activities that are unrelated to the loss of the structures on the Paraiso Site.” John Ford, memorandum to Historic Resources Review Board, Oct. 3, 2010, pp. 1-2. However, without an adequate description of the Cultural Landscape and an adequate analysis of the project’s effects on that landscape, it is simply too early to limit mitigation to the loss of structures such as the Victorian Cabins.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the HRRB.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy L. White', written in a cursive style.

Amy L. White
Executive Director