

Review of Naples plan postponed

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In light of recent grading violations at Naples, a 485-acre ranch on the Gaviota coast, the county should suspend its review of the plans for up to 55 homes there, a coalition of environmentalists told the county Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

According to county Planning and Development officials, Matt Osgood, who owns most of Naples, widened one road, bulldozed another, stockpiled the dirt and put in several water lines without proper permits.

"We're extremely shocked by the violations," said Gloria Molnar, a director of the Gaviota Coast Conservancy. "The roads should be restored before we go forward any further. We are disillusioned at this point."

The coalition also urged the board not to proceed separately with review of the applications for five homes at Naples on the north side of Highway 101.

These should be reviewed together with the additional 50 homes Mr. Osgood wants to build on both sides of the freeway, the environmentalists said.

"This is the beginning of sprawl," said Sue Higman, gesturing at a map of the proposed development, two miles west of urban Goleta. "This is the kind of thing that started Santa Monica and Malibu. It doesn't have to happen in Santa Barbara County."

The supervisors postponed to Jan. 21 a decision on how to conduct the environmental review of the Naples project.

Earlier this year, the board signed off on an agreement allowing Mr. Osgood to submit applications for up to 55 homes at Naples. The property is zoned for one home per 100 acres; a rezone would be required.

In signing the agreement, the county was attempting to lay to rest two decades of court battles with the Morehart family of Carpinteria, the former owners of Naples. Based on subdivision maps more than a century old, the Moreharts said they had the right to build on hundreds of lots.

Alan Seltzer, a deputy county counsel, reminded the board and the audience Tuesday that the county's agreement with Mr. Osgood did not guarantee approval of 55 homes.

"It reserves the county's police powers to do whatever it deems is proper, after the environmental review is completed," Mr. Seltzer said.

In an interview, Mr. Osgood said he had not committed any grading violations at Naples, except, perhaps, by failing to get a permit for the stockpile.

"These ranch roads," he said, "have been in place for a long, long time."

Mr. Osgood said he plans to buy the last 150 acres of Naples in January. He expressed frustration at the opposition to his project, saying he had been patiently waiting since 1998 for the chance to build. He said he tried and failed to establish a dialogue with the environmentalist groups.

"We know we're going to have development out there," Mr. Osgood said. "We have very strong rights. It's hard to build bridges in this process. You look like national politicians, where all you do is argue."

The Naples Coalition was formed this summer by the Gaviota Coast Conservancy, Environmental Defense Center, League of Women Voters, Audubon Society, Citizens Planning Association, Surfrider Foundation, Sierra Club and Citizens for Goleta Valley.