

Family drops lawsuit over right to develop Naples

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A Carpinteria family dropped its 15-year-old lawsuit against the county over its right to develop the 485-acre Naples ranch on the Gaviota coast.

The decision, which is to be announced today at the Board of Supervisors meeting, is considered a "good faith" measure based on an agreement drawn up between county officials and the property's new owner, developer Matt Osgood.

Last year, the county signed a "memorandum of understanding" with Mr. Osgood, allowing him to submit an application for up to 55 homes at Naples, which stretches west of the Bacara Resort & Spa along the coast and on both sides of Highway 101.

The agreement doesn't guarantee that he can build the homes, said Deputy County Counsel Alan Seltzer.

But it does make the process more efficient for both Mr. Osgood and county planners, because his project will be reviewed in its entirety instead of on a lot-by-lot basis, Mr. Seltzer said.

"It encourages a comprehensive review of the area," he said. "But it allows the county to reserve its police powers to do what it deems proper."

Mr. Osgood, who is still completing the purchase of the final acreage from the family, said the comprehensive review was "absolutely the right way to deal with this property," he said.

"It gives us the opportunity to globally address the potentially complicated issues on the Naples property."

He said he was doing his best to work with the county on the project.

The previous owners of the property, the Morehart family, had sued the county 15 years ago arguing that, based on a century-old subdivision map, they had the right to build on hundreds of lots.

Mr. Osgood has said that he would like to build 38 homes on the north side of the highway.

On the south side, he'd build 16 more, with nine of those situated along the edge of the bluffs overlooking the ocean.

Several groups have lined up against the idea, specifically plans to build on the bluffs.

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

In a victory for Gaviota coast preservationists, Mr. Osgood told the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors in January that he was committed to preparing one environmental impact report for his entire project.

Mr. Osgood expects to submit his plans to county planners sometime this summer.