



October 7th, 2015

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Forrest Ebbs, Community Development Director
City of Antioch Community Development Department
P.O. Box 5007
Antioch, CA 94531

RE: Comments on The Ranch – Preliminary Development Plan

Dear Mr. Ebbs,

Save Mount Diablo (SMD) is a non-profit conservation organization founded in 1971 which acquires land for addition to parks on and around Mount Diablo and monitors land use planning which might affect protected lands. We build trails, restore habitat, and are involved in environmental education. In 1971 there was just one park on Mount Diablo totaling 6,778 acres; today there are almost 50 parks and preserves around Mount Diablo totaling 110,000 acres. We include more than 8,000 donors and supporters.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the conceptual plan for The Ranch project. Among other things, The Ranch proposes the construction of 1,667 houses on approximately 550 acres in south Antioch, and would span both sides of Sand Creek.

We are not convinced that any project whatsoever should be built in this location given impacts on open space, home values, traffic on neighborhoods leading to Lone Tree Way, schools, etc. The Ranch is significantly different from other developments in the Sand Creek Focus Area for a number of reasons, ranging from its massive scale and aggressive proposal, to its potential impacts on Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and the future Deer Valley Regional Preserve and sensitive neighboring lands better suited for protection, to its location right at the gateway to the more than 110,000 acres of the Diablo wilderness.

The Ranch will heavily impact traffic and directly compete with property values of existing houses in Antioch which have not yet completely recovered from the impacts of the Great Recession. There are also already nearly 1,200 houses already approved or in the pipeline in the Sand Creek Focus Area, at the Aviano and the Vineyards at Sand Creek projects.

Last month's approved change in the Aviano project, which eliminated the age-restricted senior housing requirement, will result in more traffic and more impacts to local schools than were originally intended. If the Vineyards at Sand Creek project is approved, what was originally intended as a business park would become more housing, further exacerbating the jobs:housing imbalance in this area and adding to traffic and school impacts.

Talking specifically about The Ranch, the current proposal shreds Antioch's General Plan policies. It ignores the hillside protections, lot size and density guidelines, and does not propose nearly enough amenities that could be considered public benefit.



The Aviano project gained approval with a 400 ft. from top-of-bank buffer around Sand Creek, yet this project proposes less than one quarter of that (100 ft. from centerline), and shows roads and housing pads encroaching on even this narrow strip along Sand Creek.

The Ranch has disregarded ridgeline and hillside slope protections, proposes an inadequate buffer around the Sand Creek riparian wildlife and recreational corridor, lacks an extensive trail network that would increase recreational opportunities for the public, and proposes removing significant trees, such as those along Sand Creek and Empire Mine Rd., rather than incorporating them as amenities. Rather than enhancing the regional parks it lies so close to, The Ranch would impact them.

The current proposal shows streets and services stubbing out at the extreme western and southern limits of the project site. This is growth inducing and clearly paves the way for more houses in the future. This adds tremendously to the already significant cumulative impacts this project would have, especially when considering other approved and proposed developments in the area. Broad buffers should be protected at the west and southern edge of the property. The city should consider the creek as a southern edge of development, or the sloped areas. The development along Empire Mine Road should be removed entirely.

Clearly, The Ranch should be sent back to the drawing board. Does Antioch want road connections into all of the neighborhoods along the north edge of the property?

We can see a clear trend in the manner in which projects are advancing in the Sand Creek Focus Area. As long as the City continues to consider the significant changes developers ask for in an isolated, piecemeal fashion, the result will be a development landscape significantly different from what was envisioned and planned for, and perhaps very different from what the community of Antioch desires.

We once again urge the people of Antioch and its elected officials to create a detailed, comprehensive vision for the Sand Creek Focus Area that will shape proposed developments, and guarantee public benefits such as significant open space, instead of changing the General Plan over and over for each developers' project.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Juan Pablo Galván
Land Use Planner