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Agoura Residents Mobilize with Hopes to Scale Down Planned Construction

Concerned residents say Malibu will be affected by Agoura project, developers say they continue to take community concerns into consideration.

By Judy Abel / Special to The Malibu Times May 23, 2019



A gathering of Agoura, Malibu and other area residents who want input on a new development slated to be constructed near the intersection of Kanan Road and Agoura Road.

Judy Abel / TMT

Three grassroots organizations of Agoura area residents banded together last week in their effort to scale back a huge development planned at the intersection of Kanan and Agoura roads. One hundred-fifty members of SOS (Save Open Spaces), STACK (Save the Agoura Cornell Knoll) and PRISMM (Protectors and Residents of the Santa Monica Mountains) met to organize their efforts in what they called "responsible development." While trying to preserve the rural charm of their neighborhood, activists said there will be dire consequences that will also affect Malibu if proposed development is approved as-is.

Agoura Village is proposed as a one-million square foot, 135-acre mixed-use development consisting of shops, restaurants, offices, theaters, apartments and a hotel.

Part of the project—Cornerstone-at Cornell and Agoura Roads—has been delayed after STACK won a lawsuit against the developer and the City of Agoura Hills over flawed environmental impact reports. An appeal is expected, but other developments are still in the works, including Agoura Village East (AVE) and West Village.

While residents say they know they cannot stop all construction, they are asking the project to downscale from three stories high to two (citing an Agoura Hills retail ordinance) and say they're troubled with AVE's proposed transplantation of 21 oak trees. They also raised concerns that a new Marriot hotel will be just over a quarter-mile from another Marriot under construction near the 101 (Ventura) Freeway. The new development would also block the Ladyface view, residents complained, and congest ingress/egress on Kanan Road.

"I'm worried about safety and evacuation on Kanan. I would like to see responsible construction that did not further impede traffic," PRISMM member Rae Greulich stated.

"Take the driveways off Kanan Road. The pinch point intersection at Kanan and Agoura is already extremely congested."

At what was termed an "educational meeting—not a rally," Greulich said 31,000 cars travel the Kanan corridor daily and that new construction will nearly double that. She claimed traffic studies were conducted deliberately at off-peak hours and did not take beach or national park visitors into consideration. Kanan is a primary evacuation route out of Malibu and, according to the North Area Plan, can't be widened.

Area resident Judie Stein, still stinging from evacuating horses from the Woolsey Fire, reminded those attending a meeting in Agoura last week “how people have died in their cars evacuating fires.”

“We are being put into peril. This is life and death,” Stein argued.

Three employees of California Commercial Investment Cos., the firm developing the AVE portion of the project, attended the community meeting at a local church but did not speak. They did, however, respond to *The Malibu Times*' questions via email. According to the firm, area residents had been taken into consideration as plans developed—though some concerns were misdirected or based on misinformation.

Founder Gary Collett wrote he lives in the area and will house his offices at the AVE that will be located on the east side on Kanan. Collett found fault with some of the community's presentation of the project. He clarified that the AVE will consist of “119,000 square feet of commercial inclusive of a luxury boutique hotel and 141,432 square feet of residential—only 260,432 square feet in total for the entire development.”

Collett also pointed out the movement of the trees would likely be successful.

“It was stated that oak tree transplantation has a very low success rate; however, [our] oak tree expert states there is a 95 percent success rate,” he wrote.

While community members opposed two Marriotts in the area, Collett emailed “in reality, we have not chosen the hotel brand to date.”

Collett also disagreed on the height of the buildings.

“The buildings on the corner of Agoura Road and Kanan, as well as the other buildings on Kanan Road, are only one story. There is a cartoon drawing of what appears to be a 80-foot tall 'building' on Kanan and Agoura Road but, our commercial buildings located nearest the intersection are single-story,” he wrote. “We have two mixed-use buildings along Agoura Road with ground floor commercial and two floors of residential above. A portion of these buildings reach a height of 45 feet and are set back 10 feet from the property line in conformance with setback requirements.”

Collett differed on the added traffic his project could generate, saying a study was made under the direction of the city's traffic engineer and clarified the project's lighting "is down-directed and includes shields where appropriate to keep lighting directed to our site and not upwards." And, Collett wrote, "It was stated that our development would hinder evacuations if there were future wildfires; however, this very important consideration will be analyzed as part of the environmental review for the project."

Steven Hess of STACK is hoping developers will rethink and retool Agoura Village, saying, "Emotionally, I think we can agree that it's big. It looks like Ventura Boulevard."

Greulich concluded, "We're not here to tell you what to think. We're here to tell you there's a lot to think about."

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