



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS

October 26, 2016

Dave Holbrook, Senior Planner
San Mateo County Planning
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: Revised Application for proposed development on five lots at Vallemar Bluffs property, Vallemar and Juliana, Moss Beach, PLN2015-00380

Dear Dave,

Committee for Green Foothills (CGF) has reviewed the revised project plans and associated documents for the above-referenced project which (1) reduces the number of lots to five by eliminating development on Lot B, and (2) requests a variance on Lot D to allow a 35-foot front setback where 50 feet is required.

CGF appreciates the changes that have been made to the project, but we believe that it still does not comply with several key LCP and Coastal Act Policies. In particular: (1) the project would create significant adverse, avoidable environmental impacts to environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHA), (2) proposed development on Lot D would be subject to hazards from cliff/bluff erosion over the lifetime of the project, (3) the existing coastal access trail between Lot D and the bluffs will be eventually lost due to cliff/bluff erosion, and (4) development of large houses on Lots D and E would result in loss of treasured public views to and along the coast as viewed from Juliana, the coastal trail, and from Wienke Cove beach.

Environmental Impact Report: Given the potentially significant adverse environmental impacts and public controversy regarding this proposal, CGF believes that a focused EIR should be prepared. The EIR should include evaluation of an alternative that is in full compliance with all relevant policies of the San Mateo County LCP and the California Coastal Act, and that fully avoids all significant adverse environmental impacts as outlined in this letter, as well as others that may be identified in the Initial Study.

Coastal Prairie Impacts: Coastal prairie is a rare and especially valuable native grassland habitat that supports several rare and endangered species. The importance of coastal prairie habitat is widely recognized by CA Fish and Wildlife and the California Native Plant Society, among others. The San Mateo County LCP (Policies 7.1, 7.3, and 7.4) prohibits any land use or development which would have significant adverse impacts on environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHA). Residential development is not an allowable use in ESHA. The proposed residential development on Lot D would be in violation of these key policies of the LCP. For this reason alone, the proposed house on Lot D must be eliminated.

Coastal Hazards/Shoreline Development: The proposed development on Lot D is also impermissible due to projected bluff and cliff retreat over the life of the development. The coastal bluffs of the southern half of the subject property are identified as “low” stability in both the San

Mateo County LCP Hazards Map and the County Geotechnical Hazards Map. LCP Policy 9.8 requires adequate setbacks to assure stability and structural integrity for new development. Haro-Kasunich and Associates, consultants for the applicant, estimated bluff retreat of 28 feet over the next 50 years. However, this analysis is insufficient in several respects. CGF has engaged Bob Battalio and Louis White of ESA, who are acknowledged experts in coastal erosion processes, to do an independent evaluation of the projected bluff retreat in the area of Lot D per California Coastal Commission Guidance. The conclusion of their modeling is that the proposed house on Lot D would be subject to hazards from bluff/cliff retreat. There are several year-round seeps or springs on the bluff face below Lot D. Any increase in subsurface drainage or surface runoff that is directed, as proposed, into the ditch adjacent to Juliana, is likely to contribute to accelerated erosion, which would be in violation of LCP Hazard Policies 9.8.b. (6) and (8) as well as other adopted stormwater regulations. The project must ensure that all surface and subsurface drainage from homes and impervious surfaces will NOT flow into the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve which is also an Area of Special Biological Significance.

Coastal Access Trail: The existing coastal access trail and associated scenic viewpoints along the bluff-top must be allowed to move inland as the cliffs and bluffs retreat, per Coastal Act and LCP requirements that new development shall not interfere with the public's right of access to the sea. If development is allowed on Lot D, the projected bluff/cliff erosion will ultimately cause elimination of the bluff trail. CGF strongly urges that development on Lot D be eliminated, and a Floating Access Easement be recorded that will allow room for the trail to be shifted inland over time.

Scenic Views: LCP Policy 8.5 requires that new development must be located on the portion of a parcel where the development is least likely to significantly impact views from public viewpoints, and best preserves the visual and open space qualities of the parcel overall. The proposed location of two large residential structures on the open grasslands of Lots D and E will significantly impact treasured scenic views to and along the coast from Juliana, from the coastal trail, and from Wienke Cove beach of the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

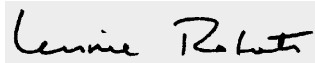
Parcel Legality: County Planning's staff-level approval in 1990 of a Lot Line Adjustment (LLA 89-21) that consolidated 42 "paper subdivision" lots into seven parcels, without public notice and review, continues to raise serious questions as to the legality of the County's action. At the time of the County's approval of these lots, the property was in a single ownership (Charnock). CGF believes that this property consists of just one legal parcel, per the "Witt" and "Abernathy" court decisions. This single parcel would not be eligible for further subdivision under the RM-CZ-DR zoning regulations. To correct this problem, the Applicant has the option of seeking a rezoning and General Plan/LCP Amendment, to create new parcels that would be in full compliance with the LCP, as described below.

Environmentally Superior Alternative: CGF urges that the site plan and lots be reconfigured in order to locate all proposed homes along Vallemar Street, among the existing Monterey cypress trees. Variances, where appropriate, could be granted so the homes could be located closer to Vallemar. This Alternative would preserve all of the coastal prairie habitat, as recommended by botanist Toni Corelli, and would fully avoid the cliff/bluff erosion hazard throughout the life of the project. The coastal trail could migrate inland without conflicting with adjacent homes and

associated landscaping/fencing, or being lost altogether due to cliff/bluff retreat. The reconfigured site plan would enable each home to have an unobstructed coastal view, the homes would be clustered to preserve the maximum amount of open space, and overall they would be far less obtrusive.

Preservation, restoration, and management of coastal prairie habitat: Due to the difficulty of assuring long-term management and monitoring of privately owned sensitive habitat areas, CGF strongly recommends that the coastal prairie and rare plant habitat areas as outlined by botanist Toni Corelli, be transferred by donation to San Mateo County Parks for permanent protection, with funding to assure stewardship of this valuable and rare native grassland habitat.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray rectangular background. The signature reads "Lennie Roberts" in a cursive script.

Lennie Roberts, Legislative Advocate

cc: Supervisor Don Horsley
Midcoast Community Council
Owen Lawlor, Lawlor Land Use
Renee Ananda, Coastal Program Analyst
Marlene Finley, San Mateo County Parks Director