

Rural Quality Coalition
PO Box 1346
Nevada City, CA 95959

March 18, 2008

Tyler Barrington
Nevada County Planning Department
950 Maidu Lane
Nevada City, CA 95959

Re: Harmony Ridge Tentative Map Early Consultation #2

54 units total:

49 lots between Harmony Ridge and Highway 20 just east of Nevada City. Access via Harmony Ridge Rd., emergency access via Cooper Rd. Includes 5 lots below Highway 20 with access via Willow Valley Rd.

Dear Mr. Barrington:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

We request that a full EIR be prepared on this project for the following reasons:

Aesthetic Impacts. The project has the potential to result in significant impacts to the Highway 20 view shed due to grading, cut and fill slopes, vegetation loss, road construction, and home building. As a result, it may potentially violate General Plan policies 18.7, and 18.8. Because of the relatively narrow frontages (approximately 200 feet), the project will have the visual impact of a 1 acre subdivision on a hill side where much larger lots prevail and are required to limit visual impacts. The main road will be highly visible.

Visual impact modeling of the project should be conducted by an independent third party visual impact expert.

Fire Safety/ Emergency Access. The ability of the proposed Cooper Rd emergency access to meet 4290 standards must be evaluated including a right of way study if it does not meet standards in its current condition.

Road A appears to exceed cul de sac standards, requiring a petition for Exception to Road Standards, whether measured from Road B or Harmony Ridge Rd. We believe that the longer measurement (from Harmony Ridge Rd.) should be used since Road B does not alleviate the key characteristic of a cul de sac: lack of a through road. In addition, Road B only provides additional access in very close proximity to the Road A entrance from Harmony Ridge Rd. This is an unsafe situation and should not be permitted. In

essence, Road A functions as a cul de sac from its beginning at Harmony Ridge Rd. Finally, we think that the maximum cul de sac standard for parcels under 5 acres in size should be used (1320 feet, rather than 2640 feet), since these parcels will all be under 5 acres (due to clustering) even though the zoning is 5 acre minimum. Related safety impacts should be explored as well as the potential for such a petition to be precedent setting, resulting in cumulative impacts across the county.

The Petition for Exception to road standards should not be issued for the Willow Valley lots. If 4290 standards on Willow Valley Rd. cannot be met without significant road improvements, tree loss, and visual impacts, these parcels should not be permitted in this location. If improvement of Willow Valley Rd. is proposed, impacts must be evaluated in detail.

Safety impacts resulting from new left and right turn traffic onto Highway 20 must be evaluated.

Other impacts which must be explored include:

Ground water availability.

Traffic impacts, level of service and safety to Highway 20 and related intersections including the intersection with Highway 49.

Air quality impacts, project and cumulative.

Biological resources.

Cultural resources.

Geotechnical impacts including slope stability, erosion hazard, and soil types relative to hazardous materials such as arsenic and serpentine.

Traffic noise impacts to new residents.

Water quality impacts relative to site runoff.

Septic system impacts. The County has not been permitting community septic system proposed in Alternative 1 because of the difficulty in maintaining them and in controlling impacts. For this reason, this alternative should not be considered. Detailed evaluation of septic system capability lot by lot should be conducted prior to draft EIR completion to ensure an adequate discussion of these impacts since the Harmony Ridge soils are known to have septic treatment constraints and because of the steep slopes on the property, making location of septic systems difficult. This may affect final lot layout and, as a result, should be evaluated at this time.

A number of parcels are smaller than 3 acres, the minimum for individual septic systems using wells. How can this be reconciled?

Mining waste impacts. A Phase I EA researched back to 1849 including soils testing must be prepared to understand potential for mining residue and hazards to be present on the site.

Alternatives. The EIR should include the evaluation of a full range of alternatives including:

1. A true clustering alternative which would cluster in the least constrained, least steep third of the sit above Highway 20 nearest Harmony Ridge Rd.,
2. An alternative which does not require a Petition for Exception to road standards (including elimination of Willow Valley lots), and
3. An alternative with half the lots proposed which allows for parcels with 400 foot plus frontages This would reduce visual impacts. This alternative could also allow a greater percentage of the steep slopes to be retained in common open space and greater area per lot to be available for individual septic systems since the flatter areas of the parcels are adjacent to the proposed road frontages.

A number of Management Plans will be required relative to the resources on the site including the open space parcels. The open space parcels should be dedicated to the County or an appropriate non-profit agency to ensure retention as open space in perpetuity.

Please keep us on the list to receive notices related to this project.

Sincerely,

Laurie Oberholtzer
Land Use Projects Director