

CITY OF ESCONDIDO
CITY COUNCIL APPEAL – PL24-0067
Hamilton Lane Residential Subdivision Project

To the Honorable Mayor and Members of the Escondido City Council,

I respectfully submit this formal appeal of the Planning Commission's approval of the Hamilton Lane residential subdivision project (PL24-0067). As a directly impacted homeowner who lives across from the proposed development site, I have serious concerns regarding the adequacy of the environmental review relied upon for approval of this project, particularly given the project's location within the known Chatham Brothers Barrel Yard contamination plume area and the substantial changes in environmental conditions since the original environmental documentation was prepared.

One of the primary issues underlying this appeal is the City's continued reliance on a Mitigated Negative Declaration originally prepared in 2007, nearly two decades ago. Environmental conditions, regulatory understanding, groundwater monitoring data, and surrounding land use conditions have materially changed since that time. Despite the passage of approximately 19 years, the project was advanced using an addendum rather than requiring a more comprehensive and current environmental review. In my opinion, this does not reflect the level of analysis warranted for a project within an area associated with known contamination concerns and a designated state superfund clean up. The Regional Water Quality Control Board itself acknowledged ongoing concerns regarding the Chatham plume in its October 8, 2014 Executive Officer Report. Specifically, staff noted that "the remedy had failed to limit the migration of the groundwater plume" and further stated that there were concerns that the existing natural attenuation remedy "will not restore groundwater quality within a reasonable time frame." Given these unresolved concerns within a designated State Superfund plume area, it is difficult to understand how a project involving grading, excavation, and infiltration based bioretention infrastructure can proceed under environmental analysis that largely relies on documentation prepared in 2007.

Of particular concern is the lack of updated and site-specific soil vapor analysis tied to current conditions. Recent monitoring reports associated with the Chatham plume continue to show the presence of contaminants in nearby areas. However, there does not appear to have been a comprehensive evaluation of soil vapor or subsurface conditions in relation to the proposed grading depths, excavation activities, utility trenching, or future residential exposure pathways. This is especially concerning given the project's location within or adjacent to a known contamination area.

Additionally, the project proposes the removal and relocation of very large granite boulders along with extensive grading. In this region, these formations are often substantially larger below grade than what is visible at the surface, meaning their removal may require deep and disruptive excavation. The environmental documentation does not appear to meaningfully analyze how this level of subsurface disturbance could affect groundwater movement, soil stability, or contaminant migration within the plume area.

I am also concerned about the proposed bioretention basin and stormwater infiltration design. The project includes plans to infiltrate stormwater into soils within or near a known contamination plume area, yet there appears to be limited analysis of whether this could alter groundwater flow patterns, mobilize contaminants, or increase migration risk to surrounding properties. This is a significant issue that warrants a more detailed and current hydrogeologic evaluation.

Beyond the environmental review itself, there are also very real construction related impacts that have not been adequately addressed. The scale of grading, excavation, and boulder removal proposed for this site will generate significant dust, runoff, and disturbance that will directly impact neighboring properties, including my own and those of nearby residents such as Norm and Debbie Greene and the Kerstiens.

Given the site's slope and soil conditions, there is a clear risk of sediment-laden runoff leaving the project site during grading and storm events. Without a more robust and clearly defined erosion and runoff control plan, adjacent properties could be exposed to sediment, contaminants, and drainage impacts. In addition, dust generated during excavation, particularly if soils contain contaminants, raises concerns about airborne exposure for nearby residents.

These construction phase impacts are not minor or speculative, they are a direct and foreseeable result of the proposed scope of work, and they deserve a higher level of analysis and mitigation than what was presented during the Planning Commission process.

The Planning Commission hearing included only limited discussion of these issues despite public concern. The reliance on an outdated environmental document, combined with the lack of detailed analysis regarding current subsurface conditions, contamination risks, and construction impacts, raises serious questions about whether the project has been adequately evaluated under CEQA.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the City Council overturn the Planning Commission's approval and require a more thorough and updated environmental review. This should include current soil vapor and subsurface investigation, evaluation of grading and excavation impacts, detailed analysis of the proposed bioretention basin, and a clear assessment of construction related impacts to neighboring properties.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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