



May 13, 2016

*Santa Ynez
Valley Alliance*

Honorable Peter Adam, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, 4th Floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

RE: Item 1: Appeal of Sierra Grande Rural Recreation Project Conditional Use Permit

Dear Chair Adam and Members of the Board:

On May 17th, your Board will consider the appeal of the Planning Commission's approval of the Sierra Grande Rural Recreation Project, a zipline on the Sierra Grande and Lonesome Ranch agricultural properties in the Santa Ynez Valley. The Santa Ynez Valley Alliance respectfully urges the Board of Supervisors to uphold the appeal of the Planning Commission's decision and deny this project.

As noted in the Planning Commission staff report, "agricultural lands play a critical economic and environmental role in Santa Barbara County. Agriculture continues to be Santa Barbara County's major producing industry with a gross production value of over \$1B. In addition to the creation of food, jobs, and economic value, farmland provides valuable open space and maintains the County's rural character."

State and local governments have pursued ways to protect agriculture in the forms of the Williamson Act (established in 1965), implementation of Local Agency Formation Commissions (1963) to protect agriculture from urban sprawl, the Farm Conservancy Program (1995) offering economic incentives, the local Right to Farm regulations, and conservation easements that give land owners economic benefits to encourage the continuance of agriculture.

Agricultural lands contribute substantially to the State and County economy and need to be protected from the intrusion of non agricultural uses. When a local government opts to begin overlaying recreational opportunities on agricultural lands, the way is paved for those ancillary income streams to outweigh the intended agricultural uses. This is a lose-lose proposition.

This project encompasses 1186 acres, all currently under Williamson Act contracts (a significant economic benefit). Of these lands proposed for recreational use, there are 86 acres of primes soils and 160 acres on the State Important Farmland Map.

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According to the California Department of Conservation, between 2012 and 2013, landowners in Santa Barbara County opted out of renewing Williamson contracts on 8,194 acres of agricultural land. Based on input from the residents of the Santa Ynez Valley during the general plan update, this is not a trend that they want to see continue.

The Sierra Grande Rural Recreation project is the first step toward bowing out of the Williamson Act in favor of some more lucrative endeavor. This slippery slope will ultimately lead to conversion of agricultural uses to even more lucrative endeavors. Cumulatively, approving these types of more lucrative endeavors on agriculturally zoned land, particularly those lands in Williamson Act contracts could have a serious impact in the Valley, trading in the primarily agricultural use and feel in the Valley into a recreational "playground" for out-of-town visitors. The staff report has not adequately considered these long-term cumulative impacts.

According to page 4 of the Board letter, the majority of the project would be located on a portion of the project site that is predominantly covered with extensive chaparral and oak woodland vegetation on steep slopes exceeding 20%. Based on this information, the Alliance also believes that impacts to biological resources have been understated.

The Santa Ynez Valley Alliance, which exists to protect the rural character of the Santa Ynez Valley and support good stewardship of natural and agricultural resources, is extremely concerned, not only about the effects this project will have on this specific property, but also about the dangerous precedent it will set for recreational uses on other Williamson Act properties.

We believe that it is in the best interests in the community that we not open this Pandora's box and, instead, urge you to uphold the appeal and deny this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Oliver', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Oliver
President