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June 29, 2010

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BY EMAIL

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA  
CLERK OF THE  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Honorable Chair Janet Wolf and Members of the Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Barbara  
105 East Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Your Meeting of July 6, 2010  
Land Use and Development Code -- Coastal Commission  
Recommendations

Dear Chair Wolf and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

I understand that you are considering a series of potential revisions to the Countywide Land Use and Development Code recommended by the Coastal Commission staff. Some of those revisions, if instituted, would have dramatic and quite unfortunate implications for Cate School, the institution that I have led for the last dozen years.

The Cate School campus includes classrooms, student activity buildings, administrative facilities, student dormitories, faculty and staff housing, athletic facilities and sports fields on a 122 acre parcel zoned AG-1. All of these facilities are permitted uses for an "educational facility" in the AG-1 Zone with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) per Article II, the Coastal Zoning Ordinance. Cate School has been operating in the AG-1 Zone with a CUP per Article II for many decades.

I recently learned that the Coastal Commission staff is recommending amendments for the AG-1 Zone. One of the suggested changes would limit schools located in the Coastal Zone and zoned AG-1 to "... the expansion or reconstruction of lawful, existing facilities," with a CUP. (Footnote 11 in Table 2-1 referring to "school" use in the AG-1 Zone.)

I have a number of serious concerns about this proposed code amendment. First, the word "school" is not defined. Does it include "boarding school" which has residential and other support facilities that would not be found in a typical non-residential school? Second, the term "expansion" is not defined. Does it include construction of a new building/facility, or is it limited to adding square footage to an existing building?

Additionally, the Coastal Commission staff recommendation appears to prohibit new schools on AG-1 property as the proposed text only addresses "existing facilities," while the County's existing Code permits new schools with a CUP. Cate School owns AG-1 zoned property adjacent to the main campus. If Cate needed to construct a school-related facility (e.g. student housing, specialized teaching site), the existing County code would allow the use with a CUP. Would the Coastal Commission staff recommendation allow

such a project as an “expansion of existing facilities” or, alternatively, would it be treated as a new use that is prohibited by the proposed amendment?

The questions we present in this letter are of great importance to Cate School because of its long and proud history of educational innovation. I am only the seventh Headmaster since Cate’s inception a century ago. The first, Curtis Cate, purchased the land on which the school now rests, nestled on a mesa between Lillingston and Gobernador Canyons in Carpinteria, with a zoning of AG-1. Eastern born and educated, Mr. Cate built a school that intentionally blended the traditional, rigorous scholarship of the best New England boarding schools, with the rustic, can-do lifestyle of the West. That marriage has over the century that followed enabled Cate to become one of the premier boarding schools in the world, operating under a CUP that supports our educational efforts. Our student body of 270 hailed this year from 23 states and 18 countries and our faculty contains many of the nation’s pedagogical leaders in secondary education. Their average tenure at Cate is 21 years.

Our success over time is predicated on the belief that nothing in education is static. We are constantly analyzing and assessing our work and its results, so that we can fully meet the needs of evolving generations of students. Much of that evolution is curricular in nature, but it involves personnel and facilities too. The school has grown thoughtfully and appropriately, always in manners that befit the school’s mission to provide the best possible education to the young people in our care. We compete for such students with schools all around the world, and our facilities, like our curriculum and our faculty, are a key factor in attracting families to Cate.

Indeed, as I write and in preparation for Cate’s centennial, we are involved in a comprehensive campaign to augment and improve our campus facilities. Among the projects underway are a series of initiatives that have drawn national attention. We have, for instance, constructed in the last three years five faculty homes that have been certified LEED platinum (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) by the U.S. Green Building Council. At the time of construction, there were only 150 such homes in the country. We have since built a child care facility that achieved a LEED gold ranking and will soon complete the first aquatic facility ever to be awarded LEED gold.

Simultaneously, we have replaced our wastewater treatment plant with a new facility that treats water to the tertiary level. We will, therefore, be able to reclaim our campus wastewater and use it for irrigation. We have created an underground cistern to hold the cleaned water before it is needed on the campus. Last week we received the final sign-off on our bio-swale project, which involved converting an old cement swale designed simply to move water off the mesa to a conveyance system designed to allow the water to seep slowly into the ground, thereby supporting an entire ecosystem of plants, animal, insects, and amphibians. All of these projects have curricular value as well, for they are used in our environmental science, biology, and chemistry programs. Indeed, we have created living laboratories with this work.

We have also partnered closely with the County of Santa Barbara and the Coastal Commission to insure that our efforts set the standard for sustainability and environmental responsibility. Indeed, you may have heard the story on NPR last week on the Sustainable Systems Institute which we hold each year at Cate to teach teachers about the very technologies that we used in developing the aforementioned projects.

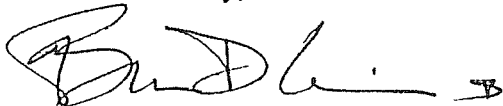
My concern is that the language of the proposed revisions to the Land Use and Development Code will make it next to impossible for us to continue the very work that we have been doing. Especially given that Cate is located within the Coastal Zone, we could face crippling restraints, especially when it comes to the continued qualitative enhancement of our site and facilities. Our efforts both programmatically and from a development standpoint have always been responsible and predicated on the mission of the school. In my time at Cate we have also purchased several contiguous properties, all of which are also zoned agricultural. At the present time we continue to farm the avocados on those parcels and use the homes thereon to house members of the Cate faculty and administration. On one lot on Lillingston Canyon Road we have partnered with the CEC to fortify and restore the streambed and banks on Carpinteria Creek and to remove an Arizona crossing which prevented the native steelhead from migrating upstream. Our own investment in that streambed project is over \$100,000.

I will not pretend to know all the ins and outs of the land use planning process. For a dozen years, though, I have been working in partnership with experts at the County to serve the interests of the school in a manner that befits those who administer the decisions you make. It would be a great tragedy, in my opinion, if the work of the school was suddenly impeded by zoning regulations that were not fully vetted and/or considered in the context of the work of organizations like ours. I would like to believe, instead, that we can be leaders and partners in an effort that means so much to all of us.

I urge that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to prepare text revisions that will continue to allow schools in the AG-1 zone with a CUP, thus avoiding the problems of interpretation and application of zoning code terms. A simple response to the Coastal Commission recommendations would be to delete Footnote 11 from Table 2-1, thereby eliminating the restrictions on school location and development.

I stand ready to assist the Board of Supervisors in any way that I can in that very endeavor.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben D. Williams IV", with a small flourish at the end.

Benjamin D. Williams IV  
Headmaster