

Planning group rejects Dictionary Hill housing

Spring Valley panel opposes first draft

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SPRING VALLEY – Dictionary Hill's trails and far-reaching views attract those craving an escape from the hubbub of city life.

The landmark also appeals to developers, but Spring Valley isn't quite ready to say yes to homes there.

The Spring Valley Community Planning Group this week rejected an early plan to build 211 homes atop the hill, described by some as the heart of the community. The 12-0 vote came after the advisory group listened to 17 people speak against the project, dubbed Highlands Ranch.

“This land is a precious community resource,” resident Nancy Prescott told the group Tuesday night. “If we lose it, we lose part of what Spring Valley is about.”

Prescott and others voiced fears of more pollution and blasting, destruction of wildlife, and the loss of what some called the community's last large piece of open space.

Planning group members were concerned about a lack of communication between the developer and an adjacent homeowners association. They said they'd also like to see a public lookout point built at the summit, and they want trails connected to the surrounding community to remain.

The 177 acres slated for the project are zoned for housing. WWI Properties, the landowner, can build there as long as its plan meets county requirements for that area, said Daniel Skiles, chairman of the planning group.

“One of them is that it be a benefit and asset to the community, and I don't feel they've done enough to meet that requirement,” Skiles said.

The project is still in the environmental review process. Although the planning group advises the county on land use issues, any final decision rests with county supervisors.

Lee Vance, an Encinitas-based land use consultant hired to work on the project, said he will continue to work with the planning group and the community.

“It's a long process and this is just a step in the way,” he said.

The planning group is expected to consider the project at least once more, Skiles said. A draft environmental impact report could be released to the public early next year, planning group Vice Chair Scott Montgomery said.

Lookout Mountain Advocates, a community group, distributed fliers before the meeting and called residents to rally against the project.

Member Chris Heiserman said the group wants the hill's habitat and native species left untouched. The group formed last year to oppose development on the hill – which used to be called Lookout Mountain – as well as adjacent Bancroft Creek Canyon.