

2/26/20

Background to our struggle to save the East Meadow

From the East Meadow Action Committee

Information on the situation that forced us, reluctantly, to sue UCSC, which all of us hold dear, and to which some of us have given years of our working lives.

The University needs more on-campus housing for students. In early 2017 a plan was developed to build on the west side of campus in a project known as Student Housing West. Then it turned out that part of that site was a habitat for the California Red-Legged Frog.

Rather than sitting down with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and proposing ways to lessen the adverse impact on the frog--a standard procedure--the University made a mistake. It decided to concentrate nearly all the housing on a much-reduced site and to export what wouldn't fit--a low-density, sprawling pre-fab development--to the beautiful East Meadow, the iconic gateway to campus. This East Meadow portion of the project provides less than 5% of the total student housing for Student Housing West.

Many things are wrong with this plan. Here are a few:

1. the proposed East Meadow sight is a karst formation, prone to sinkholes, and used by many bird, animal, and plant species. Environmental vetting and site analysis were seriously inadequate. Among the unanswered questions are how drainage from this development would affect the west side of Santa Cruz, all the way down the hill to the ocean.
2. Many with relevant expertise were not consulted or heeded on this project, which was decided in haste and went forward in secrecy for some months in early Autumn, 2017. When it came to light, our Environmental Studies faculty came out against it. Our Design Advisory Board, a group of prominent Bay Area architects appointed by the administration to advise the campus, came out against it. Hundreds of people spoke against it over the course of many public forums on the issue. Questions were raised that university representatives could not answer. Tens of thousands of people signed online petitions to save the meadow. But the administrators in charge of the program seemed impervious to new data or public opinion.
3. The University itself has proposed several alternative plans, as required by law, for providing the needed housing. All of them are plausible and spare the East Meadow. One (the East Campus Infill) passed environmental impact approval when it was first proposed a decade ago. And yet the main proponents of the project inside the administration have refused to take their own alternatives seriously.

For these reasons, among others, the East Meadow Action Committee filed suit last April. We feel that it is imperative to get our planning process right, and to avoid squandering one of UCSC's precious resources--its beauty--in order to build an ill-planned prefab project on an inappropriate site.

We filed our opening brief on January 15th. The University will respond in March; we will answer them with one more brief in April; and we will have a court hearing in May and a verdict soon thereafter.

Litigation with an expert environmental lawyer is expensive, and this case is complex. We are seeking support from friends and neighbors of UCSC to fund the remainder of our legal case preparation. I hope you will consider making a contribution. Three ways to do so:

- a. Make a donation through Go Fund Me [here](#).**
- b. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, write a check to “Environment in the Public Interest” and send it with “EMAC” on the memo line, or with a note directing the contribution to EMAC. Address: EPI-Center, [1013 Monterey St., San Luis Obispo. CA 93401](#). If you need a Federal Tax Number to contribute, the number is: 522381905.**
- c. If you would like to send a non-deductible contribution by check, please use the following address: East Meadow Action Committee (c/o Karen Bassi) [217 Dickens Way, Santa Cruz, CA 95064](#).**

More information is at <https://www.eastmeadowaction.org/>.

Many thanks for considering this, and please pass it on to anyone you know who might be interested.

The East Meadow Action Committee