

East Meadow Update, 1/16/20

Dear Friends of the Meadow,

The New Year brings a new meadow--changing dramatically from brown to green. The transformation never fails to inspire. And, for now, the great space with its sweeping horizon is still open.

EMAC's lawsuit to prevent the construction of prefab housing in the grasslands is proceeding. It bears repeating that our lawsuit does not challenge the much larger west-campus development, and the need to bring much-needed student beds to campus. Last Monday an initial brief was filed by our lawyer William Parkin in Santa Cruz Superior Court. This will be followed by a brief from the University in March, and a short reply from EMAC a few weeks after that. Oral arguments are scheduled for early May, with a judgement anticipated shortly thereafter.

The massive Administrative Record, which gathers all planning documents and records of discussions relevant to the Student Housing West project over its four years of development and debate, is now a public document in the hands of the court.

Thanks in part to this record, which includes a great deal of internal administrative data, it is now possible to reconstruct a fairly complete timeline for the development. The [attached document](#) clearly shows how the decision to build in the East Meadow was made, without public knowledge and in great haste, in less than two months near the end of Summer 2017.

At that time the Student Housing West project lost about half its land due to a decision by campus administrators not to apply for a permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to allow a taking of protected species' habitat (California Red Legged Frog). The campus authorities declined to negotiate a permit and workable mitigations with USFWS, as they had done previously and successfully at Ranch View Terrace. Instead, they pressed ahead, sacrificing not even a week of their already-aggressive schedule.

The result was a decision to build even more intensively on the drastically reduced west campus site and to off-load structures that could no longer fit there into one of the most sensitive, iconic sites of the east campus. Architectural planning, site study, and analysis of alternatives were lacking. These would be added later, under time pressure. The result was an Environmental Impact Report that provoked massive opposition when it went public the following Spring and that required serious revision.

[A "Timeline" for Student Housing West accompanies this update.](#) It documents how rapidly the decision to move East was taken, how limited the consultation was, and how the change—a revolutionary reversal of a half-century of campus planning policy—was effectively hidden from public awareness through the fall of 2017 and into the following year.

Had the administration taken the usual step of negotiating mitigation measures with the USFWS and won approval for a larger site on the west side, the East Meadow would have remained undeveloped, the Student Housing West project could have made use of a much larger footprint, with less need to build so high. And, in all likelihood, the construction of badly-needed housing would have begun by now.

EMAC's litigation necessarily proceeds within the narrow technical limits of CEQA, California's environmental law. The lawsuit challenges a still-flawed Environmental Impact Report, whose east-campus components are particularly troubling. But wider issues are raised by the decision-making process with its haste, its over reliance on for-profit partners, and its careless abandonment of the traditions of campus design and environmental sensitivity that have long defined UCSC. We hope that continuing public pressure will result in careful university growth, with no more mistakes like the East Meadow travesty.

With thanks for your continuing support,

East Meadow Action Committee (EMAC)

eastmeadowaction.org

PS: Here is the meadow last week. The photo was taken just beyond the intersection, on McLaughlin Drive. The proposed project will entirely block this view.

