

East Meadow Update, 2/9/22

Dear Friends of the Meadow,

The 6th District Court of Appeals has issued its verdict in the case the East Meadow Action Committee brought against the portion of the Student Housing West project to be built in the East Meadow of the UCSC campus. The verdict upheld the University's position that it could proceed with the proposed plan and did not have to provide further information to the public about the project's impacts.

We are profoundly disappointed by the Court's decision. We agreed that additional on-campus housing for students was needed, and we supported the original proposal for the Student Housing West project. But in September 2017, behind closed doors, the UCSC administration decided to change the project and destroy seventeen acres of the East Meadow, all merely to avoid working with US Fish and Wildlife on a modest improvement to frog habitat on the west side of campus. When we became aware of this incomprehensible and self-destructive decision, we began a protracted effort to try to reverse it.

For over a year, we attempted to work cooperatively with the UCSC administration in an effort to move forward with the housing project without destroying the East Meadow. They listened, but refused to alter their plans in the slightest. We were left no choice but to litigate, a course we have pursued over the past 3 years. Our efforts were supported by tens of thousands of people who signed petitions and hundreds of people who made contributions, all out of love for UCSC.

We brought a suit under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which permits litigation only within narrow technical confines, not on the merits of the project as a whole. In our litigation, we argued that the Regents had improperly approved the project and that they had inadequately informed the public of many of the impacts of the project, as required by California environmental law. The Courts agreed with us on the first point (necessitating a do-over by the Regents) and disagreed with us on the second point. It is on that second point that the Court of Appeals has just ruled.

The Court has 7 Justices, 2 appointed by Republicans, 5 appointed by Democrats. A panel of three is selected by lottery to hear each case. Against all odds, we drew the two Republican appointees, along with one Democrat. It may be that we lost at the Court of Appeals by virtue of a lottery.

What is particularly disillusioning, however, is the University's persistent determination to build a version of this project that is so widely recognized as being the product of a mistaken but readily correctible decision made four and a half years ago. None of the administrators who made and advocated for that decision are still in the UCSC administration. We are not aware of anyone in the UCSC administration

today who thinks this version of this housing project is the best version or even a particularly good version. But the mistake still outlives those who made it.

The Court of Appeals decision says that the university can build in the East Meadow. It does not say that it should. We will continue to work and argue against this change in the Student Housing West project, and to advocate for a plan that is not destructive of the extraordinarily valuable asset UCSC has in its exceptional campus. Certainly, the version of this project that the University originally set out to build on the west side of campus is one such option. If the University had stuck with it, students would this year be living in those accommodations.

We thank the many people who, out of respect and affection for UCSC and the extraordinary campus it inherited, supported our work in so many ways. We will continue that work for the good of UCSC, and we ask you to continue to urge the university to uphold its own stated commitments to careful land stewardship and campus planning.

EMAC

East Meadow Action Committee
eastmeadowaction.org