

East Meadow Update

February 13, 2023

The East Meadow remains intact – no bulldozers in sight. What is less immediately evident, however, is why that is so. Why has an administration so hell-bent on destroying the meadow been unable to do so?

There are two impediments to those bulldozers:

First, way back in March 2019, when UCSC first pitched the project to the Regents, Chancellor Blumenthal claimed that Student Housing West would produce student rents well below what students would pay off-campus. It was a completely unrealistic claim, but it sounded great, and the Regents remembered it.

In October 2020, with the help of so many, EMAC won a court verdict that ordered the UC Regents to vacate their approval of the project. The Regents were required to reconsider and re-approve the project. When that question came before the Regents in March 2021, it would have been possible to modify the proposal, keeping construction out of the meadow, but instead UCSC requested reapproval without changes. The Regents complied.

However, remembering those earlier UCSC claims about project rents being substantially below rents off-campus, the Regents made their re-approval contingent on a commitment to keep rents “30% below market.”

The UCSC administration got reauthorization of the project as they wished, but with a precondition they cannot possibly meet or even come close to satisfying. They have an approval they can't really use, and it is unclear how they plan to deal with that impasse.

Second, while EMAC is no longer litigating, others are. Just a couple of weeks ago, (January 17, 2023) yet another brief was filed in the Sixth District Court of Appeals (one of two that are currently pending at that appellate court). It will take this latest case more than a year to work its way through the system, so at the very least the project will be in court well into 2024. Because it is dependent on bond financing, and because bond buyers will not finance a project with pending litigation, it appears that there will be no construction for many months to come.

These are two big reasons why the bulldozers are not warming up.

It should be remembered that all this delay is a consequence of long-standing administrative incompetence dating back to the Fall of 2017. At that time, UCSC had been working for months on the original version of a project that would have been

entirely on the west side of campus – none of it in the East Meadow. This early version met with no opposition of consequence. But to save an estimated six months on the project schedule (by avoiding a negotiation with US Fish and Wildlife over accommodation of a listed species) the administration abruptly decided to modify the plan and sprawl a portion across the East Meadow. A storm of protest from many sources erupted, and as a result, the project is now headed for at least six years of delay.

If the planners had, instead, continued along the lines of the original version of the project, it would have been completed last month (January 2023, by their own schedule). Students would now be enjoying thousands of new beds of on-campus housing. Instead, construction has not begun, and who knows when, or if, it will start?

This was not a one-and-done mistake. Over and over, from the Fall of 2017 to the present, the administration has had (and it still has) the opportunity to go back to the original version, eliminating opposition and getting the project moving forward. It has never been necessary to put any of Student Housing West in the East Meadow. Due to the administration's stubborn insistence on building there, they own the delay to date and the delay yet to come.