



# County of Santa Cruz

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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ALVIN D. JAMES, DIRECTOR

## **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA: May 1, 2001**

April 19, 2001

Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, California 95060

**SUBJECT: Consideration of the Planning Commission's Recommendation  
Regarding Application 98-0046 (Mt. Hermon Camp and Conference  
Center Specific Plan/Master Plan)**

Members of the Board:

### **INTRODUCTION**

On March 14, 2001 the Planning Commission took action on the Mt. Hermon Camp and Conference Center Specific Plan/Master Plan after conducting four public hearings and reviewing the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and several staff reports prepared for this complex project. The Commission is recommending approval of the Master Plan permit and adoption of a Specific Plan for the project area to implement the project. The Specific Plan includes General Plan land use amendments to better reflect existing land uses on project properties and a few special development standards to reflect the unique characteristics of the area. Attachment 1 provides a resolution to adopt the Specific Plan as an amendment to the County General Plan and Attachment 2 provides the corresponding Zoning Ordinance amendment. The findings for approval of the project (Attachment 3) include a CEQA Statement of Overriding Considerations for the loss of historic resources. The conditions of approval (Attachment 4) will govern the existing and proposed facilities to be constructed in three phases over the next 20 years at the organized camp and conference center.

Many permit conditions were derived from EIR mitigation measures. A copy of the three volume EIR (Attachment 5) was delivered to your Board last year. A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) has been prepared, as required by CEQA, to show how permit conditions, which are also EIR mitigation measures, will be successfully

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implemented. At the Planning Commission's direction, staff organized the various report materials into a single document which became the Addendum to the EIR. The EIR Addendum document (Attachment 6) includes the MMRP, the three staff reports to the Planning Commission and other related documents. The first page of the lengthy Addendum provides a table of contents with page number for the beginning of each chapter to facilitate readers' use of the document. Certification of the EIR must include certification of the EIR Addendum. This issue is discussed below along with other relevant issues. Minutes of the Planning Commission meetings are provided in Attachments 7, 8 and 9.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Mt. Hermon camp and conference center was established in 1906 at its present location in the community of Mt. Hermon. Today the Mt. Hermon Association (MHA) owns and operates three visitor serving facilities, the Mt. Hermon Conference Center, Redwood Camp and Ponderosa Lodge. The first two facilities are adjacent to each other and are governed by Master Plan that was approved by County under Use Permit 4787-U in 1973. The first facility is a Christian conference center that includes various types of facilities including 563 visitor beds. The conference center operates year around but has its highest attendance during the three summer months. The other facility is a Christian youth camp that contains overnight lodging for 140 participants at a time. Most of the camp use occurs within the three summer months, although the camp operates with smaller groups occasionally throughout the other months of the year. The larger Mt. Hermon community also includes 450 single-family dwellings. Most of these dwellings were associated with the conference center in the past but the majority of homes are now privately owned. MHA provides domestic water service and street maintenance for the entire community. MHA also operates a wastewater treatment facility to serve the conference center. The treatment facility is regulated by the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) which issued an official Order in 1993 requiring construction of the plant to correct water quality violations affecting the San Lorenzo River. RWQCB's monitoring shows previous wastewater problems are being successfully remedied.

MHA is proposing to update their Master Plan to construct several new and replacement facilities on MHA owned properties and on a few smaller adjoining parcels that are now owned by others. The original proposal included an increase of overnight visitor beds from the existing 702 beds to 886 beds. However, the Planning Commission's action is to recommend the density of the two MHA facilities at build-out be limited to 805 visitor beds. The applicant now concurs with this limitation. A listing of the new facilities according to their construction phase is provided in tabular format in the permit conditions (Attachment 4). The new Master Plan would expand the size the Master Plan area by 7.5 acres. New facilities are proposed within a contiguous 4 acre area, but are contingent upon MHA's successful purchase of the 17 parcels directly south of the existing Master Plan boundary. These parcels are recommended for inclusion within the new Specific Plan/Master Plan area; however permit conditions I.C, I.D and I.H allow existing land uses to continue on these 17 parcels as long as they are privately owned by others. An additional 3.5 acres

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would also be added to the Master Plan area at various locations adjoining the existing Master Plan boundary. These properties are all vacant MHA owned parcels that would remain vacant under the recommended project approval. The resulting Specific Plan/Master Plan area would cover 88.8 acres. Attachment 10 shows the existing and proposed Master Plan boundaries.

### **EXISTING ZONING AND GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATIONS AND THE NEED FOR A SPECIFIC PLAN**

While MHA had originally applied only for a permit to update and expand their Master Plan, Planning staff analysis of the project ascertained related planning issues that needed to be resolved which were beyond the purview of a new Development Permit for an updated Master Plan. These issues include inappropriate zoning and General Plan land use designations within the existing Master Plan area, County Code regulations for organized camps that were overly restrictive for the proposed uses and General Plan policies regarding density that do not recognize the unique characteristics of Mt. Hermon. These issues are resolved through adoption of a Specific Plan for the Master Plan area and a corresponding rezoning of several parcels. The Specific Plan includes land use designations for several parcels, establishment of a Rural Services Line and limited site standards that vary somewhat from those provided in the County Code.

The existing Master Plan area includes 68 parcels covering a total of 81.27 acres. The expansion areas covering 7.5 acres would add another 49 parcels. Of these parcels, MHA owns 35 properties. The deeds to the remaining 14 parcels allow MHA the first option to purchase these properties when they become available for sale. The majority of the original 68 parcels are designated "Park and Recreation" by the General Plan, but several others are designated "Suburban Residential". Most properties are zoned "PR" (Park and Recreation), but many others are zoned "R-I -15" (Single-family Residential) and "SU" (Special Use). Many of the "R-I -15" zoned parcels have General Plan designations of "Park and Recreation" rather than the more consistent "Suburban Residential". For example, a portion of the existing Master Plan area includes a group of residential parcels that are zoned "PR" even though these properties do not contain camp or conference related facilities. A map of existing General Plan designations and zoning is provided in Exhibits H and I of Chapter 6 of the EIR Addendum (pages 126-127 of Attachment 6).

Changes to existing General Plan land use designations and zoning are recommended by staff and the Planning Commission to correct the inconsistent pattern of designations within the project site (see Chapter 5 of Attachment 6). Camp and conference facilities would all be designated "Park and Recreation" with a consistent zoning of "PR". Residential properties would be designated "Suburban Residential" with a consistent zoning of "R-I -15". The combination of these latter two designations recognize the unique situation of

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existing urban-like densities beyond an area with full urban services. These two combined designations will allow use of the "R-I -15" setbacks and other site standards when homes are remodeled or enlarged on these relatively smaller parcels, but the 'Suburban Residential' designation will prevent land divisions of any of these parcels above the 1-5 acre density range of "Suburban Residential". Maintaining existing residential density will also protect against further depletion of local groundwater resources, an issue that is discussed later in this report. The recommended zoning and General Plan designations are discussed in more detail in the first four pages of Chapter 8 of the EIR Addendum (Attachment 6). The rezonings would require adoption of a zoning ordinance map amendment by your Board. Changing the land use designations of the General Plan can be included in the adoption of Specific Plan for the area.

Chapter 13.02 of the County Code provides for the adoption of Specific Plans to provide better specificity to carry out the objectives of the General Plan for a specific geographic area. As a planning tool, Specific Plans are used to provide a set of focused regulations that meet the needs of an area that has special or unique characteristics. As such, Specific Plans allow adoption of standards that can differ from the standard zoning and related regulations that are applied County-wide as long as the standards are consistent with the applicable policies of the General Plan. Mt. Hermon has unique characteristics that make adoption and implementation of a Specific Plan appropriate. The community contains urban densities but is beyond both the Urban and Rural Services Lines. Domestic water service is provided to all inhabited properties by MHA in a manner similar to an urban water service provider. The core of the community is an organized camp and conference center that provides both domestic water service and street maintenance for the entire community. A wastewater treatment facility was constructed under an order by the RWQCB to serve a portion of MHA facilities even though it is not within an Rural Service Line area. The RWQCB Order requires expanding sewer service to more MHA facilities. The topography of much of the community makes development challenging yet most of the parcels in the community are developed. Some of these same type of unique characteristics have been addressed for the three San Lorenzo Valley towns by the establishment of Specific Plans (Town Plan) and Rural Services Lines (RSL) around the core areas of Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond and Felton.

Under current regulations all density in Mt. Hermon is governed by the County's Rural Density Matrix Ordinance which was developed for more remote properties without any urban services. In addition, General Plan policy 7.21.5 does not allow any wastewater treatment facilities beyond the USL or RSL; however, for MHA to have not constructed theirs would have been a violation of a State agency requirement. In regards to site standards, County Code Section 13.10.692 contains special site standards for organized camps that, among other provisions, restricts the heights of all structure to 25 feet. In staff's judgement this is an overly restrictive requirement at the MHA site, especially since

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the majority of Mt. Hermon facilities are surrounded by other properties owned by MHA and not clearly visible beyond MHA land holdings. These policy inconsistencies can be remedied by the adoption of a Specific Plan.

The Planning Commission and staff recommend adoption of the Specific Plan in two steps. The first step would be adoption of the Specific Plan, including an RSL, for the Master Plan area now as the initial action in considering establishing a Specific Plan for the entire Mt. Hermon community. The second step would be an analysis to determine how much of the greater community should be included in the Specific Plan and what policies should be applied beyond the Master Plan area. This subsequent step would require adding this item to the Planning Department's work program for the upcoming General Plan update, which is anticipated to commence in 2002. This approach allows the MHA project to go forward now without being affected by the time required for and uncertainty of adopting a Specific Plan for the larger community. This two step approach to establish the same RSL complies with General Plan policy 2.1.3 which prohibits the expansion of RSLs once fully established. Adoption of a Specific Plan would be beneficial from a planning policy standpoint regardless of updating MHA's Master Plan.

## **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

### **OVERVIEW**

The EIR and the three Planning Commission staff reports discuss the various policy consistency, community service and environmental issues of this project in detail. The major issues summarized in this letter to your Board are domestic water use and its effects on groundwater, sewage disposal for the project, effects to biotic resources and loss of on-site historic resources. Other project issues that are discussed in the attached materials include surface drainage, traffic generation, air quality and noise generation, geology and soils, odor problems at pump stations, visual analysis of the single building proposed near East Zayante Road, non-conforming rights of MHA, changes to the project as a result of Planning Commission hearings and the project's consistency with CEQA. Appropriate density for the project and related General Plan policies were also major items that the Planning Commission considered. The Commission addressed these two issues by recommending your Board limit the build-out density of the project to 805 visitor beds and adopt a Specific Plan for the area as discussed above. The five most significant environmental issues are summarized below.

### **DOMESTIC WATER AND ITS EFFECT ON THE AQUIFER**

MHA provided domestic water service for the entire Mt. Hermon community from three springs until 1992. At that time the water diversions were abandoned by MHA

in favor of constructing two wells that continue to be used to provide water to the area. Two subsurface aquifers underlie Mt. Hermon. The upper aquifer, the Santa Margarita, lies above the deeper Lompico aquifer, the two being separated by a semi-impervious shale barrier known as the Monterey Formation. In this area, the Santa Margarita is a confined aquifer referred to as the Pasatiempo subunit. It is severely overdrafted and largely unsaturated. Major water wells no longer draw from this subunit of the aquifer. The deeper Lompico aquifer within the subunit is saturated but is also experiencing overdraft. A major challenge in the analysis of this project was to determine if any portion of the proposed project could be approved without exacerbating the overdraft.

Both Hansen Quarry (formerly Kaiser) and San Lorenzo Valley Water District extract water from the Pasatiempo subunit of the Lompico aquifer in addition to the MHA wells. The Master Plan at originally proposed build-out would generate an additional water demand for 10.7 acre feet/year. This represents an increased demand of 14%. The original proposal included construction of a third MHA well to serve this additional demand, but the EIR concluded this would result in an unavoidable adverse impact on the aquifer. To investigate potential mitigative approaches to solving this impact, the EIR analyzed 6 water supply alternatives and the EIR Addendum included a 7<sup>th</sup> alternative that was ultimately selected in combination with alternative #4 by the Planning Commission and agreed to by MHA, SLV Water and the City of Santa Cruz Water Department. The combination of alternatives #4 and #7 are designated by the EIR as the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

Water supply alternative #4 consists of a strict water conservation plan that is included as Exhibit M of Chapter 6 of the attached EIR Addendum. Alternative 7, named spring diversion for direct use, is described in Chapter 8 of the EIR Addendum. In summary, this alternative would divert excess flows from two on-site springs beyond the base flows needed to sustain fisheries during the winter months and pump the diverted water to MHA's three water storage tanks for direct use during the drier months. This will reduce MHA's reliance on the Lompico aquifer during those months when impacts on the aquifer are most severe.

The recommended project conditions includes immediate implementation of alternative #4's conservation plan while planning, design and construction of infrastructure for alternative 7 is occurring. When the conservation plan has achieved its performance objective of reducing *existing* (actually 1999) water use by 7.5 acre feet/year for two consecutive years, MHA can commence constructing facilities in phase 2 of the Master Plan. Phase 3 projects can begin after the spring diversion and direct use facilities are constructed, being used and records show that MHA has achieved a water reduction of at least 3.2 acre feet beyond that achieved by the conservation plan. The recommended permit conditions also allow the construction of a 3rd well, but this well would be for back-up purposes only; would be

constructed with injection capabilities to recharge the aquifer; and would be required to be made available to other area water purveyors to assess injection as a means to further reduce the overdraft in the Lompico. Proper implementation of water supply alternatives #4 and #7 will result in the project using less groundwater than presently occurs in Mt. Hermon.

## SEWAGE DISPOSAL

The existing wastewater treatment facility was constructed to accommodate a maximum daily design flow of 95,000 gallons/day (gpd); however the RWQCB Order governing operation of the facility presently limits the average flow to 45,000 gpd within each 30 day period with no single day exceeding a daily peak flow of 53,000 gpd. Presently, average daily flows are below these figures but will increase as more MHA facilities abandon septic tank systems and hook up to the treatment facility as required by the RWQCB Order. The EIR and recommended conditions state that additional proposed Master Plan facilities, which the RWQCB was not aware of in 1999, should also connect to the treatment plant to avoid nitrate contamination of streams and groundwater.

Engineering calculations show additional flows at Master Plan build-out will increase average daily flows to 54,300 gpd and daily peak flows to 81,450 gpd. This will necessitate MHA securing an amendment to their current discharge requirements to allow these increases and may require facility upgrades if determined to be necessary by the RWQCB. Discussions between Planning and RWQCB staff indicate a high likelihood that both items are achievable as long as MHA continues to meet its 50% nitrate reduction objective. The recommended permit conditions require MHA to obtain all approvals from the RWQCB for an increase in their discharge requirements and any necessary systems upgrades prior to commencing construction of the facilities allowed in phase 2 of the Master Plan.

## BIOTIC RESOURCES

Like most of the surrounding community, the MHA Conference Center and Redwood Camp are located in redwood and mixed evergreen forest bisected by corridors of riparian woodland associated with Zayante and Bean Creeks and other smaller unnamed streams. A small pond with a perimeter of marsh habitat occurs near the recreation field. No rare plant species occur within any of these habitats in the project area but riparian and wetland habitats are sensitive habitats that are protected from development by the County's Riparian Corridor and Wetlands Protection Ordinance and corresponding General Plan policies. Both Zayante and Bean Creeks are tributaries of the San Lorenzo River and habitat for the federally listed steelhead trout and coho salmon. Any take or impacts to these "threatened" species is a violation of the Endangered Species Act. The existing pond near the recreation field contains emergent riparian/wetland vegetation and provides

potential breeding habitat for the California red-legged frog, a species which is also listed as a federally "threatened" species. Even with the interspersed conference and camp facilities, the forest habitat supports a wide range of animal species and provides suitable habitat for various wildlife species designated as Species of Special Concern (e.g. raptors, pallid bat, dusky-footed woodrat). Two insect species which are federally listed as "endangered" occur in drier scrub and chaparral habitat near the Master Plan area. Figure 4.8-1 (page 4.8-2) of the Draft EIR illustrates the various biotic habitats in the Master Plan area. Appendix F to the Draft EIR provides a detailed description of special status animal species which are known or expected to inhabit the area.

The removal of forest trees and understory to construct Master Plan facilities is the most common biotic impact from the project. There is also the potential for increased human use of riparian corridors and the hiking trail leading to endangered insect habitat due to the greater number of guests staying at MHA facilities. The EIR identifies 19 biotic impacts that will be generated by this project. All impacts can be mitigated. At the suggestion of Planning staff, MHA will formulate a comprehensive biotic mitigation plan to address these impacts in a more wholistic manner. The plan will need to be reviewed and approved by Planning staff before any Grading or Building Permit will be issued for any Master Plan facility. The recommended permit conditions include a requirement for monitoring MHA's progress in implementing the measures of the approved plan prior to issuance of each subsequent construction related permit.

## HISTORIC CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Mt. Hermon Center was established in 1906 as a Christian retreat and camp. The existing facility is considered significant in Santa Cruz County history because it is one of the few remaining facilities associated with older tourist retreats and camps that were numerous in the Santa Cruz mountains during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Five existing structures have been listed on the County Survey of Historic Resources. These structures are listed on page 4.9-3 of the Draft EIR. Appendix H of the Draft EIR provides the technical documentation for the historical designation of these structures. The Master Plan proposes of removal three historic structures to construct new structures on the same sites. One historic structure, the Newton Memorial Building has been demolished and replaced with the new Ministry Center. This project was reviewed and approved in 1997 by the Historic Resources Commission (HRC).

The Master Plan also proposes removal of two other designated historic structures, the auditorium (constructed in 1931) and Forest Hall (constructed in 1931) and relocation of the historic Central Lounge building. The HRC reviewed the historic preservation plan for these three structures in December 2000 and took the following actions:

- Approved the relocation plan for the Central Lounge as proposed;



- Took no action on the auditorium; and
- Deferred action on the plan for Forest Hall with a recommendation to include a condition in the Master Plan permit requiring this item be returned to the Commission in the future when more detailed plans for the reconstruction/replacement of Forest Hall are prepared.

Condition V.E provides the wording as recommended by the HRC. The proposed Village Center building at the Forest Hall site would not be constructed until phase 3 of the Master Plan. This condition requires HRC review and action on the preservation plan for this site prior to MHA commencing construction of any facilities in phase 3. The EIR identifies the removal of all three structures as a significant unavoidable impact. Therefore a Statement of Overriding Considerations (last 2 pages of Attachment 3) has been prepared as required by CEQA for your Board's approval. The Statement provides an explanation of why other considerations outweigh the impact of removing these structures.

## **CONSISTENCY WITH CEQA**

The project has undergone certain revisions since preparation of the EIR last year. Project revisions that result in new or increased environmental impacts typically require preparation of a Supplemental EIR or similar CEQA document to evaluate the new effects from the revised project. CEQA also allow the preparation of an EIR Addendum to discuss revisions that do not result in new or increased impacts. The project revisions that have occurred since release of the Final EIR in August 2000 are minor changes that result in insignificant effects or revisions that reduce impacts done as a result of Planning Commission hearings on the project. County Counsel, Planning staff and the Commission believe an Addendum is the appropriate CEQA document to discuss these project revisions. Addendums do not need to be circulated to the public in the same fashion as EIRs but rather provided to the decision-makers for review prior to certifying the EIR. The three Planning Commission staff reports have been included in the EIR Addendum because they contain the most substantial discussions of the project revisions.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **CONCLUSION**

The EIR and its Addendum concludes the project can support the proposed density with connection to the wastewater treatment system and implementation of strict and enforceable water conservation measures and modification of the domestic water system to one which supplements its present groundwater source with a source from two springs. The water supply alternative now selected is supported by MHA, SLVWD and County staff. The use of the new system is expected to improve groundwater levels beyond the project

site - an important project feature for an area experiencing aquifer overdraft.

The permit conditions have been designed to mitigate all other project impacts with the exception of loss of historic resources. Project revisions have also occurred to reduce impacts and address issues discussed in previous hearings. One example is the reduction of total visitor beds from the proposed 886 to 805 beds. This change has resulted in smaller lodging units at the Forest Lodge and Lakeside Lodge locations from that shown in the EIR.

Adoption of a Specific Plan for the area will provide the recommended General Plan amendments to better serve the existing residential uses within the Specific Plan area while properly designating the MHA organized camp and conference center uses. The establishment of an RSL will provide the similar benefits and meet similar needs as occurs with the RSLs established for Felton, Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek. A Specific Plan can be implemented in two steps by first adopting the plan for the Master Plan area now followed by an evaluation, public meetings and hearing to determine the proper plan policies and geographic area for the remainder of the Mt. Hermon community.

## RECOMMENDATION


It is, therefore, recommended that your Board:

1. Adopt the Resolution (Attachment 1) to adopt a Specific Plan for the Mt. Hermon Master Plan area, including:
  - a. The establishment of a Rural Services Line (RSL) for the entire project area as partial designation of a larger RSL to encompass the entire Mt. Hermon community;
  - b. Amend General Plan policy 2.3.5 to add Mt. Hermon to the list of the County's Rural Services Line areas; and
  - c. A land use designation for the 89 parcels listed in the Resolution from "Suburban Residential" to "Parks and Recreation".
2. Adopt the Zoning Ordinance Map amendment (Attachment 2) to rezone 3 parcels from the "SU" (Special Use) zoning district to the "PR" (Parks, Recreation and Open Space) zoning district; and a rezoning of 50 parcels from "R-I -15" (Single-family Residential with minimum site areas of 15,000 square feet) to the "PR" zoning district; and a rezoning from the "PR" zone district to the "R-I -15" zone district for 36 parcels.
3. Make the findings (Attachment 3) to:
  - a. Certify the Environmental Impact Report (Attachment 5) its Addendum (Attachment 6) prepared for this project;

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- b. Adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations; and
  - c. Approve a Development Permit for Application No. 98-0046 authorizing a new Master Plan according to the recommended permit conditions (Attachment 4).
4. Direct Planning staff to commence work on establishing a Specific Plan for the entire Mt. Hermon community as part of the General Plan update work program.

Sincerely,

  
Alvin D. James  
Planning Director

RECOMMENDED:

  
Susan A. Mauriello, CAO

- Attachments:
- 1 - Resolution to Adopt a Specific Plan
  - 2 - Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment
  - 3 - Findings for Project Approval
  - 4 - Permit Conditions
  - 5 - Environmental Impact Report (On File with Clerk of the Board)
  - 6 - EIR Addendum (including Planning Commission staff reports)
  - 7 - Planning Commission Minutes of October 11, 2000
  - 8 - Planning Commission Minutes of January 10, 2001
  - 9 - Planning Commission Minutes of February 14, 2001
  - 10 - Map of Existing and Proposed Master Plan Boundaries

cc: Mt. Hermon Association  
San Lorenzo Valley Water District  
Santa Cruz Water Department  
Bob Odle Associates  
Gordon Kyle