

P.O. Box 961
Camino, CA 95709

December 1, 2014

Ms. Laura Sainz
Administrative Office of the Courts
Laura.Sainz@jud.ca.gov

Re: New Placerville Courthouse, Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Ms. Sainz,

We would have appreciated more public participation of the local citizens who will be affected by the decisions being made in regards to our courthouse. By chance, we came across the DEIR buried at the El Dorado County Library. Otherwise we would not have been aware that this document was being circulated, since the county and city did not make any effort to bring it to the public's attention. The majority of those impacted by this project, such as Main Street merchants and property owners, still have no idea that comments are due today and that this project is moving forward without their input.

We recommend that you adopt Alternative 2 as the environmentally superior alternative for this project.

Under the California Trial Court Facilities Standards, 2006, a courthouse must comply with the following principles:

- Dignity of the law, importance of the activities within the courthouse, and stability of the judicial system;
- Individual expression that is responsive to local context, geography, climate, culture, and history and shall improve and enrich the sites and communities in which they are located;
- Best in architectural planning, design, and contemporary thought, have adequate spaces, adaptable to changes in judicial practice;
- Economical to build, operate and maintain;
- Provide a healthy, safe, and accessible environment for all occupants.

The existing 1913 Placerville courthouse meets the above criteria, and has a dignity that is impossible to duplicate in a modern building. It is an impressive structure and a well-known landmark as seen from Scenic Highway 50. The historic Placerville courthouse has well and faithfully performed the above duties for 100 years. In the early days Placerville was known as Hangtown in recognition that justice would be served even in the absence of a formal judicial system.

The historic courthouse is an integral and central part of the economic, social and cultural life of the city, and its abandonment would cause irreparable damage to the city. If the courthouse moved to a new location, the public defender's office, the district attorney's office, the CASA

office and numerous attorneys and other services adjunct to the judicial system would soon follow, leaving downtown Placerville a blighted ghost town. The city would be hard pressed to maintain its historical gold rush mining town ambience without its courthouse. The significant negative economic impacts and the introduction of blight created by more empty building on Main Street and its effect on the community would be an unmitigatable impact.

We did not see anywhere in the documentation any indication that the existing historic courthouse has been adequately inspected and evaluated for preservation and adaption for ADA compliance.

The courthouse must be properly evaluated by a preservationist professional and include the cost to preserve/retrofit the existing historic courthouse for adequate cost comparison.

There are a number of complex issues related to the multiple locations of the courts in El Dorado County, including the needed preservation of our historic downtown courthouse. In light of the state's budget cuts we feel the right thing to do is to step back, take another look at this courthouse and reconsider preservation as a viable alternative.

A one-size-fits-all courthouse, the same as every other courthouse in the state, is not appropriate for our historic rural county. We believe that keeping our courthouse downtown and building a smaller new courthouse to add the necessary courtrooms and facilities instead of abandoning our historic courthouse is one option, such as the DEIR's Alternative 2: Reduced Size option. This may be in the best interest of the people of El Dorado County and should be adequately evaluated.

After looking at the site for the proposed new courthouse we had to wonder about the selected location. The terrain is not flat; the 40 foot slope differences are much greater than what it looks like on paper and will clearly increase the construction costs. The aesthetics will be impacted due to the massive grading required for this project. This is an oversized building when compared to neighboring buildings. The proposed mitigation of blocking the project from the Scenic Corridor with trees and shrubs is unacceptable. This project conflicts with the City of Placerville's General Plan's Natural, Cultural, Scenic Resources, and Community Design Elements. It does not enhance and protect Placerville's community character and scenic resources. Without providing landscape and building design plans, stating that the impacts have been reduced through mitigation cannot be substantiated. Considering Alternative 2, of having a smaller footprint and retaining the downtown courthouse, would prevent the blight and economic destruction of historic downtown Main Street. This will also save the city and county the cost of new infrastructure, and will reduce the environmental and visual impact on the proposed site.

Further discussion needs to take place regarding the utilities and service system for this new courthouse. Simply stating that moving the justice system from one end of town to the other will not result in significant impacts is misleading. Not knowing what will happen with the existing courthouse, there is a potential for an increased water and sewer usage. Presently, there are issues with the City of Placerville's water and sewer lines going through downtown Placerville. This has been an issue for development projects west of Main Street. Given the fact that this courthouse is located on the western border of Placerville can only exacerbate Placerville's existing and future unfunded infrastructure problems. Placerville has been looking for ways to upgrade their water and sewer system west of Main Street. Further study of the utilities and

service system must be completed to know what is needed to facilitate the courthouse in this location. The impact of this has not been mitigated.

There appears to be a conflict of interest in regards to the ownership of the property. John Briggs is the father of a sitting El Dorado County Supervisor and grandfather to a past City of Placerville Planning Commissioner who advocated for this specific location. John Briggs is presently marketing the property as the future site for potential leased county facilities. Is this not an element of RICO?

Approving this proposed project conflicts with the City of Placerville's General Plan policy Goal G: To preserve and enhance Placerville's historic heritage, particularly numbers 1 and 2 that state preservation of these buildings is necessary for economic benefit.

There is a lot of speculation regarding the transportation mitigation for this proposed project. According to the El Dorado County Transportation Commission website, Phase 3 of the needed interchange improvements is mostly unfunded. Two roundabouts were incorporated into the Western Placerville Interchange project. Measure K passed during the November 2014 election and it requires voter approval for any project that includes roundabouts. Measure I failed and the city was relying on those funds for road improvements. Moving forward without a clear source of funding for the road improvements necessary for the increased capacity generated by this proposed project is irresponsible. Reading through the documents, it appears that the funding for the necessary road improvements for the proposed project is coming out of local transportation funds. This is an additional negative impact to the economic and social health and welfare to those that utilize the road system in the City of Placerville. With the Western Interchange becoming a priority for transportation funds it is reducing the ability for the City to provide essential services and transportation needs of their existing population. This is another example of the project impacting the economic and social needs of the public. Before declaring that the Transportation and Circulation has been reduced to an insignificant impact, the State needs to show a clearer source of funding. The City of Placerville simply cannot bear the burden of this proposed project.

There will be environmental impacts that are significant and unavoidable due to this proposed project. In order to approve the proposed project, the lead agency must demonstrate that social, economic, and other benefits outweigh those unavoidable environmental impacts. In this case, the proposed project will induce blight by negatively impacting the City of Placerville's social and economic welfare. Therefore, there are no economic and social benefits to outweigh the environmental impacts and the proposed project cannot be approved.

Alternative 2: Reduced Size project, an environmentally superior alternative, can still accomplish most of the design principals and objectives while maintaining the economic and social benefits of the City of Placerville. Therefore, the State must not accept the proposed project and instead should choose Alternative 2: Reduced Size.

Sincerely,

Sue Taylor
Save Our County
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