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Escondido, CA 92025

Graham Mitchell, City Manager
Escondido City Hall, Second Floor
201 North Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

August 2, 2016

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

I submit this letter on behalf of the San Pasqual Valley Preservation Alliance, an Escondido-based group formed to finally give voice to the serious and wide-ranging issues affecting the San Pasqual Valley that have sadly been overlooked for far too long. On July 28, 2016, we received an email blast from John Helmer, Consultant in the Planning Division of the City of Escondido, to community members who previously asked the City to notify them of any and all instances when the Safari Highlands Ranch (SHR) project is to be discussed or voted on by the City during its application process. This email list was created after an abundance of community feedback about the lack of transparency and advanced notice when issues related to the SHR proposal were being addressed in City meetings and forums.

Much to our dismay, Mr. Helmer used this email list to send out what amounts to an advertisement for Concordia Homes, Safari Highlands Ranch, their website and promotional newsletter. Unlike information originating from the City of Escondido which is assumed to be factual and unbiased, Concordia's website and newsletters are simply marketing materials for the developer. The community expects the City of Escondido and its representatives to maintain a neutral position when evaluating the SHR proposal on its merits and impacts. Promoting a private entity in this way crosses the boundaries of how City representatives should interact with the applicant (Concordia Homes, LLC) and the public with regards to Safari Highlands Ranch.

It is worth noting that similarly, on April 26, 2016, Mr. Helmer spoke during a Community Forum, hosted by the San Pasqual Union School Board, and defended Concordia and the SHR project from negative feedback and concerns being expressed by the community, despite the fact Concordia representatives were in attendance. As with the email referenced above, Mr. Helmer overstepped the boundaries of his role as an impartial Consultant for the City and promoted SHR to the public in ways more consistent with being a lobbyist for the developer than the City official charged with overseeing the application process.

With a proposal this large, complex and hotly contested by community and local groups, the City of Escondido must be extra vigilant to avoid even the appearance of actively promoting a project still under review by the City. Mr. Helmer should not have used that email list to direct concerned citizens seeking precise information on the SHR application process to Concordia's online marketing campaign, and another email should be sent to that list acknowledging this error. We further urge the City and its representatives to recommit to maintaining very clear boundaries with all groups that have business before the City so that these types of transgressions do not continue to occur.

Regards,


Chief Executive Officer, SPVPA