

Susan Adams, President
Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903



May 10, 2011

Re: Southern Counties Oil Company Mitigated Declaration of Environmental Impact and Master Plan Amendment, Precise Development Plan Amendment, Tentative Map Waiver, and Use Permit at 150 Shoreline Highway, Mill Valley,

Dear Supervisors:

The Marin Conservation League is interested in the proposed development at 150 Shoreline, Mill Valley, because it is located on a site that is 500 feet from Richardson Bay in an area of chronic flooding and exposure to potential tsunami and the effects of future sea level rise. Notwithstanding the merits of the project itself and the successful mitigation of other impacts, the May 10, 2011, staff report and resolutions do not acknowledge the potential hazard of future sea level rise and are therefore incomplete.

We raised this issue in a letter to the CDA dated January 20, 2011. The Negative Declaration states the following: "The height of the finished floor would account for settlement of the structure within 100 years and would maintain compliance with the 100-year base flood elevation. Sea level rise will likely change the base flood elevation over this time frame, and it is recommended that the building design include adjustable connections to the foundation to allow for raising the structure above the base flood elevation after long-term settlement and sea level rise." (emphasis added)

In this manner, the Negative Declaration acknowledges that sea level will rise in this location, although the time frame cannot be predicted with any precision. Sea level rise will be experienced on land not as a gradual phenomenon but rather in episodic events such as extreme high tides and storm surges. The effects of the past winter's high tides show that the area is now subject to flooding and will become more vulnerable in the future. Furthermore, even if the building itself may be elevated, access throughout the area has proved difficult during flood events even under today's sea level conditions. The extraordinary construction techniques required for this project point to the problematic nature of the location.

Even though this is a previously developed site within a Master Plan for the area, the proposal raises issues that the County must address in a more comprehensive way. The

Countywide Plan (2007) states the following (EH-3.3):

“Monitor Environmental Change. Consider cumulative impacts to hydrological conditions, including alterations in drainage patterns and the potential for rise in sea level, when processing development applications in watersheds with flooding or inundation potential.”

The Plan goes on to state: “Why is this important? With increases in sea level rise due to global warming, flooding is predicted to increase in the future. Locating development in flood-prone areas can expose structures to damage and create risks for inhabitants in the immediate and surrounding areas.” Under Implementing Program EH-3.k, the Plan recommends:

“...amend the Development code to incorporate construction standards consistent with policies of BCDC’s Bay Plan for any areas subject to increased flooding from a rise in sea level.”

For this project, we recommend that the resolutions specifically acknowledge this issue and the design standards that address (mitigate) them. It is not enough to mitigate the impacts of individual projects, however. On a broader scale, we urge the County to work with other Marin jurisdictions and initiate comprehensive planning policies that address the effects of climate change on Marin’s many vulnerable low-lying areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nona Dennis".

Nona Dennis, Vice President
Marin Conservation League

cc. Tamalpais Planning Area Bayfront Coalition, c/o Curry Eckelhoff