



Monterey County Planning Commission

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Agenda Item No. 1

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PLN150337 ESALEN INSTITUTE

Public hearing to consider:

1. Construction of three new employee housing structures containing 32 new employee housing units (12,893 square feet in total), to be added to an existing structure containing 11 employee housing units that will remain, resulting in an 43-unit employee housing complex and construction of a 1,133 square foot common room for employees of the Esalen Institute; and
2. After-the-fact permit for construction of a 600 square foot garage that houses a fire truck for the Big Sur Fire Brigade

The project includes development on slopes over 30-percent and within the viewshed of Highway 1.

Project Location: 54105 Highway 1, Big Sur, Big Sur Coast Land Use Plan, Coastal Zone.

Proposed CEQA Action: Addendum to a previously adopted Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration pursuant to Section 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission:

- a. Consider an Addendum to the 2002 Esalen Institute Main Campus and the South Coast property Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration that was adopted by the Planning Commission on November 12, 2003, pursuant to Section 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines;
- b. Approve a Combined Development Permit consisting of:
 1. After-the-fact Coastal Administrative Permit and Design Approval for a 600 square foot garage that houses a fire truck for the Big Sur Fire Brigade;
 2. A Coastal Development Permit and Design Approval for phased development of a 32-unit employee housing complex including:
 - a. Phase 1:
 - i. Construction of a 4,292 square foot two-story, 10-unit, multifamily housing structure ("Building 2");
 - ii. Construction of a 5,771 square foot three-story, 14-unit multifamily housing structure ("Building 3"); and
 - iii. Related site improvements including a new loop driveway for fire access, new landscaping, new pathways, and enlargement of the existing septic system.
 - b. Phase 2 includes:
 - i. Removal of temporary housing constructed under separate permit (12CP01355);
 - ii. Construction of a 2,668 square foot two-story, 8-unit multifamily housing structure ("Building 1"); and

- iii. Construction of a 1,010 square foot one-story common area with laundry, kitchen, and gathering area.
- c. An existing 11-unit one-story housing facility will remain on-site, resulting in a 43 unit employee housing facility;
3. Coastal Development Permit for development on slopes of 30 percent or greater,
4. Coastal Development Permit for development in the critical viewshed; and
5. Adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan.

A draft resolution, including findings and evidence, is attached for consideration (**Exhibit B**). Staff recommends approval subject to 23 conditions of approval and 9 Mitigation Measures.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Property Owner: Esalen Institute

Agent: Hugh Brownlee

APN: 421-011-018-000

Zoning: Watershed and Scenic Conservation 40 acres per residence, with a Design Control Overlay (Coastal Zone) [WSC/40-D (CZ)]

Existing Parcel Size: 15.6 acres (679,536 square feet)

Plan Area: Big Sur Coast Land Use Plan, Coastal Zone

Flagged and Staked: Yes. February 2016 and February 11, 2020.

SUMMARY:

The Esalen Institute owns and operates two properties in Big Sur; the “main campus” and the “south coast campus” generally located off Highway 1 north of the town of Lucia and south of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. The main campus is located west of Highway 1 and offers workshops and classes, lodging for students and visitors, a cafeteria, classrooms, and natural hot springs perched on the cliffs of Big Sur. The south coast campus (located at 54105 Highway 1) is located approximately 1 mile north of the main campus and on the east side of Highway 1. It was originally developed in the 1950’s as the South Coast Motel and was converted to employee housing associated with operations at the Esalen Institute main campus.

The Esalen Institute proposes to construct three new buildings containing 32 employee housing units, and a common building area on the south coast campus site. The proposed development would replace 11 units containing 22 beds destroyed by fire in 2011 and would be additive to the 11-unit employee housing building that survived the fire and still exists at the site. This represents a net increase of 21 units from the original campus for a total of 43 units.

Following the fire in 2011, the Big Sur Fire brigade constructed a garage on the property that houses a fire truck without permits, so this application includes after-the-fact approval for this structure. In addition, the Esalen Institute received permits (12CP01355) to construct a new parking lot located east of the access drive serving the site, and to install three (3) modular housing units to provide 10 temporary housing units for Esalen employees. Two of the three modular units were installed - one adjacent to the existing housing structure, the other located in the parking lot. The third unit was not installed as the manufacturer was unable to provide the unit. Two (2) phases of development are proposed with this permit. Phase 1 would be completed following approval of this proposal and Phase 2 would be initiated after the completion of Phase 1 and based on funding availability. The first

phase includes removal of one of the temporary housing unit previously permitted at the site, construction of Buildings 2 and 3 containing a total of 24 permanent employee housing units, and site improvements related to access, landscaping, and parking. Phase 2 would include removal of the remaining temporary employee housing units previously permitted, construction of Building 1 containing a total of 8 permanent employee housing units, and construction of a common room containing a community kitchen area, lounge and laundry room. The project will provide housing for employees of the Esalen Institute utilizing an existing developed site and would not be used for visitor accommodations.

The south coast motel was constructed on two terraces that were graded to create level building pads at the site. An existing 11-unit employee housing structure still occupies the lower terrace area and the structure that was located on the upper terrace was destroyed by fire and removed. Proposed buildings and common area improvements will be located on the upper terrace and on the slope leading from the lower terrace to the upper terrace which is a manmade slope in excess of 30 percent. In addition, a driveway, with parking areas along the outer edges of the driveway, will be improved to wrap around the buildings. Portions of the driveway and parking areas north of Building 3 will encroach into 30 percent (approximately 500 square feet). Findings that the proposed development on slopes in excess of 30 percent better achieves the goals and policies of the Big Sur Land Use Plan can be made in this case. Development on slopes is clustered around existing development and disturbed areas, minimizes impacts on the critical viewshed, and avoids impacts on natural vegetation in the vicinity.

Staking and Flagging of the structures was erected and staff conducted a site visit on February 11, 2020, to determine if structures would be visible from Highway 1 (within the critical viewshed). Orange netting depicting a portion of the top of Building 3 is visible from one point just north of the driveway entrance and a portion of the top of Building 1 would be visible from one point just south of the driveway. Both viewing areas are limited to a single location no more than 10 feet in the north/south directions and only small portions of the tops of the buildings would be visible once constructed. Trees and topography screen views of the site from the remaining areas along Highway 1. The existing 11-unit employee housing building is visible from the same viewing point north of the driveway and from the Highway directly in front of the driveway. The Big Sur Land Use Plan allows replacement or enlargement of structures lost in fire on the original location on the site, provided no other less visible portion of the site is acceptable to the property owner, and provided the replacement or enlargement does not increase the visibility of the structure. The new buildings and improvements have been sensitively sited in the same location as the structure destroyed by fire, in a cluster around the existing structure that survived the fire, and new structures have been designed at a height and with materials that will help the structure blend with the surrounding topography and vegetation. The structures are all located east of Highway 1 and will not obstruct views of the ocean.

DISCUSSION:

A more detailed discussion is attached as Exhibit A.

CEQA:

An Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) was prepared for an application involving improvements to the Esalen Institute Main Campus and the South Coast property in 2002.

That IS/MND was adopted by the Planning Commission on November 12, 2003 (Resolution No. 03080). An Addendum to that IS/MND has been prepared for this project pursuant to Section 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines. The Addendum makes minor revisions to the previously adopted IS/MND to incorporate specific changes proposed with respect to employee housing on the south campus site and describes how the current proposal will not result in significant changes requiring major revisions to the IS/MND. There have been no substantial changes in circumstances that would result in new or more severe impacts on the environment and no new information is known that would result in new or more severe impacts on the environment. There are 3 mitigation measures that are applicable to the South Coast property or both the South Coast and Main Campus properties including Mitigation Measures 2 (portions of), 10, and 16. Other mitigation measures are applicable to only the main campus property. No new development is proposed on the main campus property at this time and no new mitigation is proposed for the South Coast property. With the previous mitigation applicable to the south coast property incorporated, the project will have a less than significant effect on the environment.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The following County agencies or departments reviewed this project:

RMA-Public Works RMA-Environmental Services

Environmental Health Bureau Water Resources Agency Cypress Fire Protection District

LUAC

The project was referred to the South Coast Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) for review on two (2) separate occasions. The first review was held February 3, 2016 where the project proposal was approved unanimously (3-0) with no abstentions. (**Exhibit E**). Because of changes in the project - revisions to a somewhat smaller project - and the time gap between the 2016 LUAC meeting and this Planning Commission presentation, Staff felt that the project should be presented to the LUAC for review and comment. The LUAC reviewed the project at a duly-noticed public meeting on February 11, 2020 and voted 4 - 0 (4 ayes) to support the project as proposed.

Prepared by: R. Craig Smith, Associate Planner, x6408

Reviewed by: Brandon Swanson, RMA Interim Chief of Planning

Approved by: John M. Dugan, FAICP, RMA Deputy Director for Land Use and Development

The following attachments are on file with the RMA:

Exhibit A - Discussion

Exhibit B - Draft Resolution, including:

- Conditions of Approval/Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan
- Site Plans, Floor Plans, Elevations, and Phasing Plan

Exhibit C - Vicinity Map

Exhibit D - Previously Adopted Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration

Exhibit E - Addendum to previously adopted Initial Study/MND

Exhibit F - LUAC Minutes February 11, 2020

Exhibit G - Biological Report

cc: Front Counter Copy; Planning Commission; California Coastal Commission; Cypress Fire Protection District; Environmental Health Bureau; RMA-Public Works; RMA-Environmental Services; Brandon Swanson, RMA Interim Chief of Planning; R. Craig Smith, Project Planner; Hugh Brownlee, Agent; David Arkin, Architect, Bruce Christiansen, Esalen Institute, Owner; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch; RMA-Planning File No. PLN150337