

Sierra Colina housing project prevails in court over League

By Kathryn Reed

Just more than two years to the date of filing a lawsuit to stop the 18-acre Sierra Colina project in Stateline from progressing, the League to Save Lake Tahoe lost its battle.

The winners are Steve Kenninger and Gail Jaquish who own the property and want to develop it, as well as TRPA.

The League had sued the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency – citing transfer of land coverage as its main issue.



Sierra Colina, outlined in orange, in Stateline won in court on Aug. 30.

U.S. District Judge Robert Jones in Reno on Tuesday ruled in TRPA and Sierra Colina's favor.

"Judge Robert C. Jones' decision heralds a significant victory by allowing responsible development which invigorates the economy and creates jobs to advance in the Lake Tahoe Basin without frivolous lawsuits tying up environmentally beneficial projects," Kenninger said in a statement.

Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League, did not respond to a request for comment.

“We were confident throughout the whole process that the Governing Board made the right decision with the approval of the Sierra Colina project,” Julie Regan, spokeswoman for TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The board approved the project in summer 2009.

Regan elaborated that the bi-state regulatory agency is extremely pleased the judge cited the numerous environmental benefits of the project in his 25-page decision.

The decision released Aug. 30, came 29 days after both sides gave testimony. At that time the judge wondered why the lawsuit was filed. Jones in his ruling cites much of what the final environmental impact statement says in terms of quantities of pollutants that will no longer enter Lake Tahoe if the project is completed, how the project goes beyond the environmental requirements, how bike-pedestrian trails will be improved, and the reduction of disturbances in stream environmental zones.

“The court spent a great deal of time walking through the various environmental benefits of the project and that was a factor in the decision,” Regan said.

Kenninger and Jaquish did not wait for the judge’s decision to begin environmental improvements. Work on Burke Creek is under way.

With the Lake Tahoe Basin having a limited time frame when dirt can be moved – May 1-Oct. 15 – the soonest ground could be broken is next year because building permits still need to be secured and the economy needs to help indicate when would be the time to build.

When built, Sierra Colina will include 41 market rate

dwelling and nine moderate-income deed restricted places. Forty-two units will be in 21 townhouse-style duplexes, with eight being single-family homes.

The goal is to be the first neighborhood in the basin to have all units meet state of the art green sustainability criteria.

Here is the court ruling.