

Letter: Martis Valley project reality check

To the community,

Well, there's some good news and some bad news regarding the sprawling Martis Valley West project. The good news? East West Partners currently does not plan to build 112 luxury lodges in a gated community atop an undeveloped ridgeline at Lake Tahoe. The bad? The Martis Valley West project is still atop that ridge, but now it could grow to be significantly larger than was originally proposed. How much larger? East West isn't saying.

Here's what we know: There will be more development than originally submitted on the Martis Valley (Northstar) side of the ridge – 760 units instead of 648, plus 6.6 acres of commercial. This means no net reduction in the number of units, and some kind of new development still planned for a forested ridgeline.

Incredibly, the Tahoe area has no enforceable ridgeline standards in place from either Placer County (which oversees the non-basin portion of this project) or the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (which handles the Basin portion). So big developers are free to submit plans for new subdivisions and other developments of any size, on or off undeveloped ridgelines.

Additionally, East West's proposed area plan, which includes that ridgeline luxury community, has only been suspended, not terminated.

They can and will continue to pursue permissible uses on Tahoe lands, and the aforesaid area plan will only be terminated when permits for a viable project are approved. What this means is that they could (and probably will) be going after a

change of zoning: from forest-conservation to resort recreation zoning (which, among other things, allows condominiums) for this undeveloped one-mile stretch of forestland.

East West has also recently floated the idea of building more than 800 campsites on this land, with RV parking, yurts, “eco-shelters,” a clubhouse-lodge, and a pool. By comparison, Yosemite – which is over 200 square miles – has just 1,445 campground spaces. Imagine how much more population density, traffic, and noise/light pollution this size development will bring to the Tahoe area.

This is not a done deal, but East West should tell the public what they intend to do – especially with the lands inside the Tahoe basin – immediately. Projects of this size do not exist in a vacuum; they have cumulative negative environmental impacts, as well as negative effects on wildlife and every resident of the North Shore and the Martis Valley. Should they receive the approval they’re seeking, Martis Valley West will be a precedent-setting project, and no ridgeline in this area will be safe.

They cudgel East West holds over our heads is the agreement they have to “save” 6,300-plus acres in Martis Valley, land their partner (Sierra Pacific Industries, a logging firm) owns, in exchange for this huge new incursion on land where residential development is currently not allowed. East West characterizes the community’s valid concerns as a “Tahoe basin-centric focus ... which jeopardizes” this conservation agreement – which, by the way, is between East West and two conservation groups with no presence in the Basin.

So in short, it sounds like our worries are far from over. The only way to stop the madness is for TRPA and Placer County to immediately institute enforceable ridgeline protections; public pressure is the only way to make them listen. Go online to find out who to write to.

Coral Amende, Incline Village