

Lopez, Maria [COB]

From: Jesse Zwick <jesse@housingactioncoalition.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 29, 2026 2:54 PM
To: COB_Response; Fourth District; Foley, Katrina; Nguyen, Janet; Wagner, Donald; Sarmiento, Vicente
Cc: Kirk, Justin; Victoria Gomez
Subject: Item 23 -- Deny Appeal and Approve Saddleback Meadows Use Permit (PA23-0119)
Attachments: HAC_Saddleback Meadows_Approve Use Permit.pdf

Attention: This email originated from outside the County of Orange. Use caution when opening attachments or links.

April 29, 2026

Chair Chaffee and Honorable Supervisors
Orange County Board of Supervisors
400 Civic Center Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Saddleback Meadows Use Permit (PA23-0119) — Deny Appeal and Approve Use Permit

Dear Chair Chaffee and Honorable Supervisors:

The Housing Action Coalition writes in strong support of the Planning Commission's January 28, 2026 approval of Use Permit PA23-0119, and urges the Board to deny the appeal filed by the Saddleback Canyons Conservancy and Rural Canyons Conservation.

This is a project the Board has already approved, on a tract map this Board itself certified less than a year ago. If a project that has been entitled, litigated, settled, and re-approved over four decades can still be undone by a last-minute appeal on issues long since resolved, it destroys the legal certainty every housing project across Orange County depends on — and makes the housing crisis harder to solve.

The question you are adjudicating today is very narrow, and the answer is exceedingly clear. On June 24, 2025, this Board approved Final Vesting Tract Map 15230, reflecting the 181-lot Saddleback Meadows development. Under California Government Code § 66498.1, that approval confers a vested right to proceed with development in substantial compliance with the ordinances, policies, and standards in effect at the time of approval. The narrow statutory exceptions — a condition dangerous to public health or safety, or required compliance with state or federal law — are not present here. The Orange County Fire Authority has approved the Fire Master Plan, Fire Protection Plan, and Fuel Modification Plan; the Board adopted an updated Unified Emergency Operations Plan in December 2025; and RSEIR 566 Addendum No. 2 evaluated cumulative traffic and fire impacts under current standards.

The Use Permit before the Board does one thing: establish setbacks, heights, and lot coverage to implement the already-approved 181-unit development. It is not a vehicle to revisit the Area Plan, the Vesting Tentative Tract Map, the Final Vesting Tract Map, or the certified environmental documents. The appeal periods on those decisions have long since passed. The appellants are asking the Board to do something the law does not permit it to do.

Denial would also expose the County to liability under the Housing Accountability Act. Government Code § 65589.5 applies to discretionary use permits and subdivision approvals for housing development projects of two or more units. Saddleback Meadows is 181 units. Disapproving this Use Permit, or imposing

infeasible standards on a vested project, would invite an HAA challenge with mandatory attorney's fees on a finding of violation.

The history here matters. This site was first zoned for residential development in 1980. A tract map for 705 lots was recorded in 1988. Through environmental review, two rounds of litigation, two settlement agreements with environmental groups, multiple addenda, and successive reductions, the project has been reduced by 74 percent from the original entitlement, with 186.6 acres set aside as Scenic Preservation and Natural Resource Protection Area, much of it under permanent conservation easement to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Thirty-eight years and multiple lawsuits is enough.

Orange County is not building enough housing to meet its needs. When projects can be tied up for nearly four decades through serial appeals on issues already settled, every other project in the County becomes harder to finance, slower to build, and easier to obstruct. We urge the Board to deny the appeal, uphold the Planning Commission's approval, and let this long-deferred project move forward.

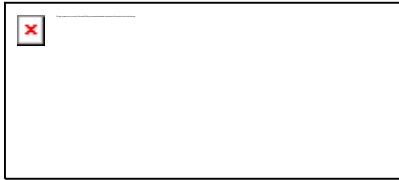
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Jesse Zwick | Pronouns: He/Him

Southern California Director | Housing Action Coalition
555 Montgomery Street, Suite 720, San Francisco, CA 94111
Cell: (213) 537-3689 | Office: (415) 300-0967



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Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jesse Zwick', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jesse Zwick

Southern California Director
Housing Action Coalition

cc: Response@ocgov.com; Fourth.District@ocgov.com; Katrina.Foley@ocgov.com;
Janet.Nguyen@ocgov.com; Donald.Wagner@bos3.oc.gov; Vicente.Sarmiento@bos2.oc.gov