

SACRAMENTO Business Journal

December 23, 2002

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Judge partially clears path for Sunrise-Douglas development

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Two of three potential blocks to the development of the 22,000-home Sunrise-Douglas community in Rancho Cordova have been pretty much removed.

Sacramento Judge Lloyd Connelly last week ruled that a lawsuit brought by Legal Services of Northern California against Sacramento County's approval of the project was groundless.

At the same time, tentative agreement has been reached between the Sunrise-Douglas landowners, including Angelo Tsakopoulos, and the owners of a rendering plant near the project that should settle the plant's odor problem.

Legal Services is a law firm that advocates affordable housing. The firm sued the county after the county's approval of Sunrise-Douglas this summer. The firm claimed that the county could not legally approve the project because the county was in breach of a 1996 settlement agreement in which the county agreed to keep a standing inventory of 1,003 acres zoned so that they could be used for affordable housing.

Legal Services charged that the county hasn't kept a valid inventory. Consequently, the county is in violation of state law that requires such an inventory and can not approve new projects like Sunrise-Douglas.

Among other things, Legal Services claimed the county incorrectly kept land in the inventory that had since become part of the new city of Citrus Heights.

But Judge Connelly found that the county has in fact kept its inventory up to date, and that the Citrus Heights land could be included, said Diane McElhorn, deputy Sacramento County counsel.

Connelly didn't finalize the judgment. But will do so January, after Legal Services has had time to study

the most recent county quarterly report on the inventory status, she said.

The judge also suggested the county and the law firm cooperate to create a more reliable inventory report, said John Hodgson, the land-use attorney representing the landowners.

Hodgson also said that a legal battle between the landowners, the owners of a rendering plant near Sunrise-Douglas is basically settled. The plant recycles the carcasses of animals.

The landowners have agreed to ante up "most" of the \$3.2 million to build a protective "superstructure" over the plant and to buy improved cleaning equipment. All but two of the 18 landowners had signed the agreement as of Monday and the others are expected to shortly, he said.

Remaining is a lawsuit filed by community activists and environmentalists, claiming that the project's environmental impact report was inadequate.

The recent happenings, however, go a long way toward clearing the decks for development. Sunrise-Douglas is expected to provide housing for the growing business parks in Rancho Cordova, the biggest office center in the Sacramento region.

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