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## OPINION

TODAY'S EDITORIAL

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### A poor day for the board

Usually, at this stage of a major campaign season, it's a relief to find a subject, other than politics, about which to editorialize. However, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors' decision to give the green light to a major development on the Gaviota Coast is not one of those occasions.

On a recent 3-2 vote, the board majority decided to allow an Orange County developer to move forward on plans for 71 mansions on hillsides overlooking Highway 101, and beyond it, the open expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

In so doing, the board majority virtually ignored years of protests against such development, gave its stamp of approval to a project that was changed after a final environmental impact report was released, and essentially tied the hands of future boards to have any substantive control over development of large portions of the coast.

And they seemed in a rush to hand this silver platter over to the developer. The question any self-respecting steward of the environment would ask is — why?

There's no way to know for sure, but this rush to judgment coincides, rather suspiciously, with the impending departure of Brooks Firestone from the board. Perhaps the board's North County triad wasn't so sure that majority status would be maintained, after the Nov. 4 election.

We say suspiciously because of the circumstances, and the sequence of events. Changes were made in the county's memorandum of understanding with the developer in a closed-door session. Shouldn't this discussion have taken place in public view?

Why, after months of public hearings at which Firestone asked virtually no questions, did he seem to be the supervisor pushing this decision forward? Why would the board ignore the advice of its own planners, approving a project that, to many people, is so deeply flawed?

And finally, what is there about a totally transparent, out-in-the-open decision-making process that caused the board majority to act so quickly and, in part, behind closed doors?

There may be perfectly sound explanations for these precipitous moves, but unfortunately, the public has no idea what they may be.

The Gaviota Coast development agreement is not a proud day for the board majority, or for a fair and open democratic process.

October 24, 2008

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