

## **Supervisors Clash Over Large Home On Gaviota Coast**

By Melinda Burns

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Plans for one of the largest homes ever proposed on the rural Gaviota coast — a 13,000 square-foot house as long as a football field —stalled Tuesday as North County supervisors reluctantly asked for more information on whether it would mar the view of the mountains.

Supervisor Joe Centeno of Santa Maria said he would have liked to vote Tuesday in favor of the home on Farren Road, but had been advised by County Counsel that further review was needed. Centeno said he didn't know whether the county's longstanding policy on views was meant to appease residents of Santa Barbara or drivers on Highway 101.

"I can't imagine why people get so concerned," he said. "Let's let these people build their home and get on with their lives."

The Farren Road proposal by Randall Welty and Lynn Ballantyne is the most contentious of several recent plans for large homes to be reviewed by the county for the Gaviota coast.

In all, there would be nearly 16,000 square feet of buildings at 500 Farren Road, including the barn, guest house and two garages. The main house, 300 feet long, would be located on a prominent ridgeline that can be plainly seen from Highway 101.



The plan was turned down by the county Planning and Development staff, then approved 3-2 on appeal by the county Planning Commission with some changes — most notably, a 300-foot-long berm, or earthen wall, that is designed to hide the home from the highway.

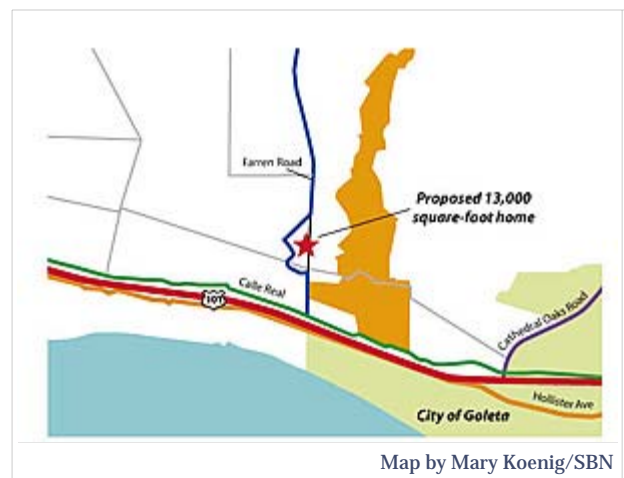
On Tuesday, county Board of Supervisors Chairman Brooks Firestone, who represents the Gaviota coast, abruptly cut short a presentation by Allen Bell, a county staff planner who was explaining that even with the berm, the home on Farren Road would violate county policy.

"How can this be an accurate description of the project?" Firestone asked.

Bell responded that according to county policy, new homes must be located "so as not to intrude into the skyline as seen from public viewing places." There is nothing in the policy about berms, he said.

Clearly irritated, Firestone called a break, conferred with County Counsel Shane Stark, and, on reconvening, led the board into a closed session.

When the supervisors returned to the hearing room, Marc Chytilo, an attorney for the Gaviota Coast Conservancy, urged them to listen to their staff planners and overturn the commission's decision. The staff, he said, had done its job by flagging the problems early on, giving the developers a chance to make changes.



It would be wrong to issue a permit for such a large home in a rural area of the coast, a home four times the average size in the neighborhood, Chytilo said.

"We're not trying to penalize these applicants," he said. "They can have their dream house by moving it."

Chytilo warned the supervisors that the county policy on views meant what it said.

“Your interpretation of the ordinance is an invitation to developers to ‘game’ this process,” he said. “Do them the favor of showing them they have to make some compromises.”



The home would be located on a ridgeline visible from Highway 101. Santa Barbara County photo.

Richard Adam, an attorney representing Welty and Ballantyne, disagreed, saying there was no reason to go through further review after more than eight months of appeals. He said the plans represented “the epitome of what is desired in Santa Barbara County,” including solar heating, solar electricity and green waste recycling. The entire south-facing side of the house is proposed to be a wall of glass.

“This is a good project that has gone through the public process and has been made better,” Adam said. “It’s taken enormous time, effort and money. I find it to be appalling.”

During his turn at the podium, Welty told the board that he and his wife had been “scandalized” by coverage of the project in the press.

“We feel we’ve been dealt with like the Duke lacrosse team,” he said, referring to the college players who were falsely accused of rape.

Joe Armendariz, executive director of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association, said he supported the Farren Road proposal because it would generate \$100,000 yearly in property taxes for the county.

Opponents of the project on Tuesday included members of the Sierra Club, Audubon Society and Citizens Planning Association and residents of the neighboring Rancho Embarcadero housing tract. They said the proposed house was too big and would be clearly visible above the berm from a number of vantage points.

“What’s the point of ordinances if you’re not disposed to enforce them?” asked Edward Easton of the Sierra Club.

Joan Bolton of Rancho Embarcadero told the board she had helped collect 132 signatures in her canyon against the project.

With 17 acres available for the proposed house, Bolton said, “Surely there’s room to build something that conforms to the county’s rules. Allowing Ms. Ballantyne to bend or break the rules sets a dangerous precedent.”

The board voted 3-2 to postpone a decision, pending further review. South Coast supervisors Salud Carbajal and Janet Wolf voted against more delays, saying they had enough information to turn down the project.

“I felt the original staff report was well thought out,” Wolf said. “The issues were stated plainly.”

Contact Melinda Burns at [mburns@sbnewsroom.com](mailto:mburns@sbnewsroom.com)



A berm would hide views of the home from the south, developers say. Santa Barbara County photo.

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