

## NO RUSH FOR 2ND ACCESS ROAD

### CALAVERAS ALLOWS DEVELOPER'S APPLICATION TO CONTINUE

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SAN ANDREAS - When the next big fire sweeps across the Forest Meadows subdivision, residents may not have an escape route if the road entrance is blocked.

Calaveras County supervisors had hoped by February that a developer would propose a way to build a second public street out of the upscale golf-and-housing development near Murphys onto nearby Highway 4.

But that didn't happen. Instead, on Feb. 28, the supervisors voted unanimously to allow developer Lou Papais to continue processing an application to create as many as 217 additional home lots in the project, which already has about 550 homes.

Papais ultimately hopes the board will allow him to create the additional home lots without secondary road access. He argues that if he creates a paved emergency road - with a locked gate that fire crews can open - the subdivision will be safer than it is now.

Whether county officials will ultimately let him do that is unclear. State law and Calaveras County codes require large housing developments in fire-prone forests to have multiple escape routes.

To grant final approval without a second road access, supervisors would have to find that an "overriding consideration" means the development is worth building despite the fire hazard.

"Secondary access is a pretty big deal," said Supervisor Steve Wilensky, a former firefighter whose West Point-area district also is fire prone.

Forest Meadows is in District 3, represented by Merita Callaway, who lives in the development and is well aware of the fire danger.

"I've been evacuated twice," Callaway said.

Still, many residents of Forest Meadows say they don't want a second public road into their gated community.

"Having a secondary access into Forest Meadows is ridiculous as far as we're concerned," said Dave Turner, president of the Forest Meadows Owners Association. "We don't have a traffic problem at our entrance."

County staff had recommended denial of the development application as incomplete, since it did not address the secondary-access issue.

Papais said it simply isn't possible to find a route from the development to Highway 4 that the California Department of Transportation will approve.

And he left the Feb. 28 vote convinced supervisors were behind his emergency-access-only proposal.

"There is no other location that you could do another entrance," Papais said Monday. "The mountain climbs too fast."

Yet several supervisors said they'd like to see the results of a complete traffic study before making the final call, and they clearly said they still hope for secondary access.

County Planning Director Rebecca Willis said Caltrans officials indicated they were willing to study a proposed route to access Highway 4.

Papais, in contrast, said Caltrans officials have already rejected it twice.

Wilensky said he does not want to see Papais spend money on studies that won't pay off.

"I don't want to invite people into a dead-end process," Wilensky said. "I'm worried they're already trapped in a one-exit situation."

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