

Excelaron DEIR comments  
Jenn Skinner  
to:  
jdmckenzie  
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August 3, 2011

Mr. John McKenzie

Department of Planning and Building

Re: Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Excelaron/Mankins  
Conditional Use Permit (SCH No. 2009021025/DRC2009-00002/ ED09-039)

Although I have not read a word of the Environmental Impact Report prepared for the proposed Excelaron/ Mankins Oil Project, I am fully aware of its many inconsistencies, oversights, and blatant inaccuracies. I'm very familiar with the rhetorical contents of the EIR because my husband (along with many concerned citizens in our community) eats, breathes, and sleeps it. It is discussed at the dinner table, in the shower, in the car, on the soccer field, and in bed. This project has infiltrated our lives for the past 3+ years, altered our farming practices, and robbed valuable hours from our family lives. What a waste of time, energy, and money: our families, the Huasna community fighting it, as well as yours!

So, why has this project has been allowed to progress with so many issues that are unanswered, inconsistent, illogical, or simply impossible. The fact that the property owner doesn't actually own the proposed project is just one minor little detail or that the owner of the mineral rights is the same man that previously drilled and left a mess at the site. Then, there's the alleged access through the Porter ranch with an antiquated bridge that's in a flood zone most of the year. An accident related to these issues could end up dumping oil into the Huasna river that feeds the Twitchell Reservoir, a primary water source for Santa Maria, and nobody cares!!! Fundamentally, the proposed industrial use is grossly incompatible with the pristine rural agricultural land in the Huasna Valley. The fact that this project has already cost the county so much money in time that won't be recovered and that property values in the Huasna Valley will (and have already) been deflated as large rural properties fail to sell in the wake of a oil field in the Huasna Valley seems like a no brain- project stopper yet staff continues to facilitate and support the applicants ever-changing, incompatible, and unfeasible project. WHY?!

But, I think I know the answer... In my brief time exposed to and practicing public planning in various jurisdictions, I witnessed the political forces that manipulated the planning staff's recommendations. I watched as bad projects were approved, supported by the planning staff with orders from the top. Few questions were asked of the applicant with the right connections. It was a primary reason for my diverging from a planning career. With this insight, I can only assume that someone involved with the project has some major political pull with the county. Why else would the county choose to support such a ludicrous project?

You reassure us that conditions will be attached to the proposed use permit to minimize impacts. But, I also experienced, first hand the lack of enforcement power a planning department holds to enforce conditions of a use permit. I'm skeptical that conditions placed on the use permit will ever be enforced and our valley will be at the mercy of Exceleron's money-hungry exploitation.

I really hope that the SLO county planning department can rise above the political pressures on them and do the right thing for our community as well as the entire county. Some have called us NIMBY's, but is caring about the place we live in and wanting to protect it for future generations such a bad thing? And if we don't, who will? Industrial uses like oil drilling have their place and it's not in the remote, pristine Huasna Valley. We've invested a lot into our land, taking care of it and improving it. Please don't allow the proposed oil field to jeopardize our health, safety, and economic viability. I encourage you to take a closer look at the many negative impacts this project will impose and decide it is not a good fit for the Huasna Valley.

Sincerely,

Jenn Skinner