

Protecting Our Ventura Hillsides

Over the last several months, there has been a great deal of community discussion regarding Regent Properties' proposal to build 55 homes on 40 acres of the Mariano Rancho in the hills above Ventura. Recently, Regent Properties and the Ventura Hillsides Conservancy (VHC) entered into an agreement to negotiate for a donation of approximately 722 acres should the development, known as the La Viera project, win approval. Regents' donation would result in the preservation of this land in perpetuity and provide trail connectivity from Hall Canyon to Grant Park and the Ventura Botanical Gardens.

Since the announcement, the VHC has fielded inquiries from its own members and the wider community as people seek to better understand the details of the La Viera project. Some wanted to know more about the process by which the proposal will be evaluated by the Ventura City Council. Still others wanted to voice their opinion for or against the project. People also want to know what role the Conservancy has in this.

The Ventura Hillsides Conservancy is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) land trust organization with a mission "to preserve the hillside, canyons and open space that contribute to the unique character and natural environment of the City of Ventura and the surrounding region for the benefit of present and future generations." If the Conservancy becomes the steward of this land then that mission will be carried out.

As a land trust, the VHC is traditionally neutral and does not to take a position for or against a particular development. Our role is to acquire, protect and steward land in order to maintain open space for the good of the planet and for Ventura's citizens and visitors to enjoy. We are not a political organization, and so we leave the debate to such worthy organizations as the Ventura Citizens for Hillside Preservation, which has worked on these issues for over a decade, and the recently formed Neighbors for the Ventura Hillside.

The Conservancy supports the policies, procedures and regulations set forth by the City of Ventura. We believe that the Ventura City Council and Planning Commission should thoroughly investigate the La Viera project. Our elected and appointed officials should evaluate the facts and weigh the concerns of citizens as they make the appropriate decision, whether that decision is an approval of the project or a denial that would result in the rescinding of the offer of the acreage.

The agreement with Regent simply enables us to be in a position to negotiate how a donation of land would be handled by the Conservancy. There are many details that must be worked out with donations such as this, including such issues as safety, access, maintenance and restoration of natural habitat – but that's part of VHC's unique role as a land trust. We are dedicated to ensuring that the hillsides that make Ventura so special are protected and well stewarded, for now and for generations to come.

David Comden
President

Paul Meehan
Vice President