TO: Leah Brock, Yavapai County Development Services
FROM: Keep Sedona Beautiful (KSB)
RE: KSB Response to proposed Spring Creek Ranch Planned Area Development
DATE: November 20, 2019

HA#: PLA19-000008

Thank you for the opportunity to review this application for a zoning change, from RCU-2A to PAD.

The Spring Creek Ranch project proposed by SCR Manager, LLC is massive in scope, and raises a number of concerns. A development this size would have a significant impact on nearby communities and must be appropriately and thoroughly studied. Cottonwood, Sedona, Clarkdale and particularly the rural community of Cornville need to fully understand the impact of a large development like Spring Creek Ranch.

Keep Sedona Beautiful (KSB) is concerned with the following project elements.

Water: As the Letter of Intent recognizes, "*The property sits in a valley with active natural springs, forming Spring Creek, running through the center of the property*." KSB is concerned that this development may negatively impact one of the area's key riparian habitats. It is also critical that we understand water use and depletion rates, including upstream groundwater depletion and downstream surface water depletion. We recommend that an expert evaluation be required prior to any rezone approval, to understand how the development will impact groundwater tables and what the impact will be on the Spring Creek riparian habitat.

KSB notes that since Oak Creek is designated an Outstanding Arizona Water (OAW), and Spring Creek feeds Oak Creek, the development's wastewater reclamation facility seems to require an individual Section 401 water quality certification. The EPA states:

> "*Under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), a federal agency may not issue a permit or license to conduct any activity that may result in any discharge into waters of the United States unless a state or authorized tribe where the discharge would originate issues a Section 401 water quality certification verifying compliance with existing water quality requirements or waives the certification requirement.*"

According to the US Forest Service, Spring Creek is "*impaired for E. coli*", and a mitigation plan is in process. The developer should be required to document how they will support that mitigation process and how they will ensure that the additional stress

put on Spring Creek due to proximity of residential and commercial units will avoid exacerbating the current E. coli problem. KSB recommends that this be a part of a Storm Water Pollution and Construction Runoff Prevention Plan.

Sewage processing: While KSB understands that the sewage system cannot be part of the County planning and zoning decision, it is a critical element in understanding how this development will impact the surrounding natural area. Assuming no septic system, we strongly support grey water availability for non-potable uses, as currently modeled by the City of Cottonwood. Further, we feel strongly that no fresh ground water should be used for outdoor use such as landscape and/or golf course irrigation.

Energy: KSB recommends the widest possible use of Solar panels. We feel that the statement in the Letter of Intent that "*Sustainable building practices will be implemented, including solar panel installation throughout the residential housing portion of the community*" is inadequate and should be strengthened. The applicant should specify the sustainable building practices they intend to implement and should specify a minimum amount of solar panel usage that they commit to. They should also commit to installing a certain number of electric car recharging stations.

Lighting: KSB is concerned such a large community will need dark-sky compliant lighting exceeding current codes in order to keep glare to a minimum. As noted above, this project is essentially developing a small city. KSB would be happy to work with the developer to ensure dark skies are preserved.

Cultural Heritage: No mention is made in the documentation from the developer of any surveys having been done of the development area with respect to archaeological finds and evidence of remnants of ancient dwellings, rock art, cultural sites important to past or present indigenous nations. Springs historically often are sacred sites for indigenous cultures. The whole Verde Valley and Red Rock area is known for its wealth of cultural remains. Arizona law is protective of such sites. There is evidence of remnants of at least one large multi-room house in the PAD area and rock art nearby or within the area. (Please see enclosed photo.) The house remnant in particular needs to be protected and perhaps registered with a local archaeological society. It is located in lot 1G of the development plan – a common use area designated as Village Center.

KSB recommends that a full archeological analysis of the site be performed in order to determine if cultural resources are also present on this site.

Wildlife: There is a high potential for severely impacting threatened, endangered and other sensitive wildlife species that inhabit Spring Creek and the surrounding area, including but not limited to the endangered spikedance and Gila topminnow, the threatened northern Mexican gartersnake, and the threatened yellow-billed cuckoo.

KSB recommends that expert analysis be completed to determine the potential impact on threatened and endangered species.

If the Forest Service concludes that a "lawful fence" is needed at Spring Creek Ranch in order to keep cattle off of the property, then KSB is concerned that wildlife movement will be obstructed and certain wildlife may no longer have access to this portion of Spring Creek.

KSB recommends expert consultation from a group like the Nature Conservancy prior to any decision on rezoning, to identify how wildlife movement pathways can be preserved in the area.

Short-term rentals: In their Letter of intent, the developers note that "*Short term, transient, rentals will be prohibited, except as to RV park visitors*," but they also state that "*MH lots and RV pads will be similar in size and will be utilized interchangeably*." This allows the developer to dedicate up to 2,500 units to short-term rental. KSB finds this aspect of the Letter of Intent to be concerning.

Ownership of land: In their Letter of intent, the developers note that "*Current property owners will retain ownership of all SCR land and shall lease homesites to residents desiring to purchase a home and/or guests visiting RV area.*" We find this concerning, as communities across the country have experience with such leased plots becoming unaffordable as owners steadily increase rental fees, well above the rate of inflation.

Community Facilities and Services: KSB is concerned that initial residents of the community may find themselves without the amenities promised by the developer. The Letter of Intent states that "*Development will progress based upon market demand and sales. Given the needs of the surrounding areas for homes priced in the range anticipated at SCR, sales are expected to progress rapidly. Build out of the entire project is anticipated to range from four to six years but will ultimately depend upon market conditions.*" We recommend that the promised amenities be required to be made available in the initial phase of development. This commitment by the developer will both demonstrate good faith and will help ensure that the development will not become a modern "ghost town," with a few residents occupying a community with no amenities.

Impact on area Schools: The developer notes in their Letter of Intent that "*No age limitations will be imposed*." KSB concludes that residents will include families with school-age children. Given the significant potential population, KSB recommends that the developer be required to provide estimates on the impact to local area school districts.

Impact on Traffic: The addition of approximately 3,100 units will have a measurable impact on the traffic of the area. Traffic has already become a quality of life issue with current residents. Traffic and congestion were key complaints heard from residents

when Sedona conducted surveys for the recently completed Sustainable Tourism Plan. While KSB does not oppose development, we question the appropriateness of mega-projects such as this that will negatively impact the quality of life for current residents.

KSB recommends that a traffic study be conducted to guarantee that residents of Spring Creek Ranch have adequate egress in case of emergency, such as flooding or wildfire. We also recommend that the impact on roads and traffic for current residents of Cornville be evaluated.

The Letter of Intent proposes building two bridges across Spring Creek. KSB asks whether these will require permits by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Landscape: KSB believes that only locally native drought-tolerant plants and trees should be used throughout in any new development. Water-intensive grass lawns should not be used. Non-toxic herbicides and pesticides are available, and because of the proximity to Spring Creek, the developer should commit to their use.

Impact on the Current Local Community: Page 6 of the Yavapai County Comprehensive plan states:

> *'Our vision is to protect the unique quality of life characteristics within each of Yavapai County's diverse communities, to preserve our Western rural and ranching traditions, and to responsibly manage the process of urbanizing communities, when desired, through sensible planned growth and the sustainable use of finite resources. This vision is a reflection of the shared desire to protect and enhance rural character; small town friendliness; abundant natural open spaces, public lands, and scenic vistas; and to ensure the compatibility between rural and urbanizing areas.'*
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> *'The County's vast recreational and outdoor opportunities, abundant natural beauty, scenic vistas, clean air, forests, grasslands, healthy rivers and bio-diverse riparian areas will be protected and preserved through the implementation of the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan's goals and objectives. We recognize the importance of safeguarding the County's resources for future generations, including our treasured rivers, streams and other resources…'*

The Spring Creek Ranch Letter of Intent anticipates 3,100 housing units: 1900 manufactured home lots, 600 recreational vehicle pads, 400 rental units and a 200 unit assisted living facility. Estimating only 2 occupants per unit, when fully built, approximately 6,200 residents would be added to the low-density rural community of Cornville that currently has a mere 3,280 residents.

KSB believes that rezoning these parcels will quickly double the size of rural Cornville, which is identified as a Rural Community (RC) Area in the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan. This development does not seem to conform with the vision set forth in the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan, and would add a large high-density cluster in a currently low-density rural community.

Conclusion: After considering the information that the applicant has provided about their Spring Creek Ranch proposal and after considering the likely impact of the development on the land and the communities, Keep Sedona Beautiful opposes this rezoning request.

Sincerely,

Bill Pumphrey
President, Keep Sedona Beautiful

Image of Native American habitation