

From: LaVere, Matt <Matt.LaVere@venturacounty.gov>

Date: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 at 3:58 PM

To: Ben Harvey <Ben.Harvey@ojai.ca.gov>

Subject: Cabin Village/Honor Farm

Good afternoon Ben,

I know there have been a lot of questions raised about the Honor Farm site as a potential location for Ojai's Cabin Village. It is really important to me that I have a strong relationship with the City of Ojai, and you and I have worked well together on several important issues. It is always my goal to help the City however I can. However, for all of the reasons discussed below, the Honor Farm is simply **not** a viable option for the City's Cabin Village.

To start, I was intimately involved in analyzing the viability of the Honor Farm as a potential location for the MESA youth housing project which ultimately ended up in the east end of Ojai. Myself and County staff spent a lot investigating what it would take to put MESA at the Honor Farm. Through this process we identified numerous roadblocks (discussed in more depth below) and realized that the Honor Farm wouldn't work for MESA's housing project, especially given the timelines involved with their HomeKey grant.

When the idea of Ojai's Cabin Village being sited at the Honor Farm was raised by the City and others in the community, county staff and I again did a deep dive into this feasibility of this concept. Below are some points from the Honor Farm site analysis previously done by the County, with maps attached to illustrate the issues as well. County staff (from multiple departments) and I spent numerous hours analyzing this site, and I was involved with several site visits as well to further delve into the feasibility of this site. As you will see below, the site isn't feasible for many reasons. This was not a rash decision, rather one that was deeply investigated. The site is problematic for the following reasons:

1. The site is located in a High Fire Hazard Severity zone (see attached map) and the fire department let us know they had serious concerns about circulation and access in case of emergency. Rectifying these access concerns would require significant and costly infrastructure upgrades. Furthermore, as you and I both know, building in California's High Fire Hazard Severity Zones is extremely difficult due to stricter building codes that require expensive fire-resistant materials and construction methods, the cost and logistical challenges of implementing necessary fuel breaks and defensible space, insurance issues such as high premiums or non-renewals, and project delays from extensive environmental reviews and potential CEQA lawsuits.
2. The site's current Open Space zoning does not allow for residential development. The site is subject to County SOAR because of its Open Space designation. The attached Zoning map demonstrates the parcel is in Open Space (OS-40). Also, this designation does not allow for state streamlining for residential uses (because it is permanent housing, rather than shelter/transitional housing) that would

accommodate the strict ERF funding timelines. It would require the project go through the County's re-zoning process, adding significant time to development. This process alone would likely take several years, would require an affirmative vote from the Board of Supervisors (no such re-zone has been approved during my nearly 5 years on the Board) and then would require an affirmative **countywide** SOAR vote from the public (since annexing the site into the City is not possible).

3. Another planning challenge is that there is an existing CUP on this property that would have to be amended to allow for this type of residential development. Not impossible, but again, CUP amendments take time (especially if detailed environment review is required, which is likely for this site given the high fire zone and flooding issues on the property). Most CUP amendments of similar scope in my experience have taken at a minimum 4-5 years. Camp Ramah's recent CUP amendment process (which was not as significant as the proposed Honor Farm plan) took closer to 8 years.
4. The water, sewer and electrical infrastructure on the Honor Farm site is incredibly old and would require significant, costly upgrades if there were to be residential development. The current infrastructure is already quite problematic for the current nonprofit/commercial tenants and would likely require a complete overhaul for a more intensive use such as the Cabin Village.
5. There are no nearby services and there is no safe access (walking or biking) for proposed residents to access services. The Trolley Stop is close by but you would need Caltrans approval to perform ADA improvements in their right-of-way to allow for safe pedestrian access on Hwy 150. Getting such improvements on the Caltrans work plan takes years, and that is if they even allowed such improvements. Bringing the Trolley on site would raise the same access/circulation concerns noted by VCFD.
6. There are existing lease agreements for the site (I believe 10) that would need to be terminated or amended, including the master lease with HELP of Ojai. We would have to work with numerous non-profits to terminate or amend their leases.

From my perspective, all of this analysis clearly shows that it would be nearly impossible to use the Honor Farm for the Cabin Village. If you were to explore the feasibility of the site you would quickly identify all of the roadblocks/challenges the County has already identified. Given the breadth of these identified challenges and knowing the strict rules/timelines associated with the City's ERF grant, it is my belief that the Honor Farm is **not** a feasible option. I don't see any viable path forward.

Best,
Matt

Matt LaVere
Supervisor | District 1
800 South Victoria Avenue | 4th Floor
Ventura, CA 93009-0001 (805) 654-2703

Matt.Lavere@venturacounty.gov
www.ventura.org/board-of-supervisors/district-1

