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Document prepared for: Kyle Cheromcha

CASE NAME

Highway 68 Coalition vs. County of Monterey, et al.

CASE FILING DATE

Dec. 12th, 2023

CATEGORY

Writ of Mandate Unlimited (02)

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Active

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15	SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA	
16	COUNTY OF I	MONTEREY
17	HIGHWAY 68 COALITION)	CASE NO.
18	Petitioner)	COMPLAINT AND PETITION FOR
19	vs.	INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AND WRIT OF MANDATE
20	COUNTY OF MONTEREY; MONTEREY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Respondents.	
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22)	
23	FRIENDS OF LAGUNA SECA A NON-PROFIT PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION and DOES 1-50, inclusive,	
24		
25	Real Parties In Interest.	
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27		
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COMPLAINT AND PETITION FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AND WRIT OF MANDATE

Petitioner HIGHWAY 68 COALITION (hereinafter referred to as "Petitioner" or "Plaintiff") brings this action on its own behalf, on behalf of its members, on behalf of the general public, and in the public interest and hereby alleges as follows:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Petitioner's First Cause of Action alleges the current use and proposed future use of the Laguna Seca Recreation Area ("LSRA") violates the zoning of the property and seeks to curtail that continuing violation. Petitioner's Second Cause of Action challenges the approval by Respondent Board of Supervisors of "Concession Agreement for the Operation And Management of the Laguna Seca Recreation Area between The County Of Monterey and Friends of Laguna Seca" on July 18, 2023 ("Concession Agreement") along with certain other actions taken in conjunction with the approval of that project including, but not limited to, approval of the use of categorical exemptions to excuse the preparation and consideration of a legally adequate environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq. and the filing of a Notice of Exemption. The project encompasses the LSRA including the racetrack on the site and surrounding environs.

II. PARTIES

2. Petitioner Highway 68 Coalition is an unincorporated association of property owners living and owning property in the Highway 68 corridor of Monterey County. Prior to the close of the public hearings before Respondent County of Monterey on the project, Petitioner exhausted its administrative remedies related to the violation of CEQA in that one or more of its members and its attorney objected orally and/or in writing to the use of any categorical exemption and objected to the approval of the project. Highway 68 Coalition (hereinafter referred to as Petitioner) has standing in this action. Petitioner is beneficially interested in

 decisions affecting land use, water use, and other environmental consequences of governmental decisions which affect the Monterey Peninsula and in particular the Highway 68 corridor, and is beneficially interested in the enforcement and application of CEQA and the planning and zoning laws of the State of California.

- 3. Petitioner brings this action on its behalf, on behalf of the members of the Coalition, on behalf of the public, and all other parties similarly situated, as private attorney generals to enforce CEQA, the General Plan and zoning ordinances of Respondent County and other land use laws that protect the environment, scarce resources, and the public's right to participate in the planning process. Petitioner is adversely affected and aggrieved by the failure of Respondent and Real Party In Interest to conform to the environmental and zoning laws of the State of California. Petitioner has exhausted all available administrative remedies.
- 4. Respondent COUNTY OF MONTEREY ("County") is a public entity and political subdivision of the State of California. It is responsible for enforcing and implementing the County's own General Plan through its zoning ordinances and other land use decisions. It is responsible for compliance with (CEQA), among other statutes, regulations, and policies, in regard to land use and planning decisions within the County's jurisdiction. The County was the CEQA lead agency in the preparation and review of the concession agreement and the adoption of the categorical exemptions from CEQA. It is the owner of the real property and all assets of the LSRA.
- 5. Respondent MONTEREY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ("Board of Supervisors") is the legislative body of the County of Monterey and is in charge of all administration of the County. It reviewed and made the decision to approve the concessionaire agreement without sufficient compliance with CEQA.

- 6. Petitioner is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Real Party In Interest FRIENDS OF LAGUNA SECA a non-profit public benefit corporation ("Friends") is doing business in California, and is in good standing. It has a beneficial interest in the Concession Agreement.
- 7. Petitioner does not know the true names and capacities of the Real Parties In Interest named herein as DOES 1 through 50, inclusive, and therefore sues said parties under fictitious names. Petitioner will amend this Petition to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Petitioner is informed and believes and thereon alleges that the fictitiously named real parties in interest are in some manner responsible for the events alleged herein, and have, or purport to have, an interest in the approval of the concession agreement granted to Friends and challenged herein.

III. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 8. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure Section 1085, and Section 1094.5 and Public Resources Code section 21167, 21168, 21168.5.
- 9. Venue is proper in this Court since the cause of action arose in Monterey County pursuant to the Respondents' certification of the categorical exemptions from CEQA and issuance of entitlements under the concessionaire agreement for the LSRA.
- 10. The parties hereto entered into three (3) tolling agreements permitting this Writ of Mandate to be filed on or before December 15, 2023.
- 11. Petitioner has served written notice to Respondents of its intention to file this Petition pursuant to Public Resources Code § 21167.5 on December 11, 2023.

IV. PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 12. The racetrack on the LSRA property has existed since 1957, with the first event held on November 9, 1957. Respondent County of Monterey (County) has owned the LSRA property since 1974 and the facility is currently operated by the Parks Division of the Department of Public Works, Facilities and Parks (PWFP). LSRA is open year-round and includes the WeatherTech ® Raceway at Laguna Seca, campgrounds, a hospitality venue and a public rifle and pistol shooting range.
- 13. The LSRA is located approximately 10 miles east of the City of Monterey and 10 miles west of the City of Salinas. The site is bounded on the South by State Highway 68, on the north, northwest and east by the Fort Ord Military Reservation, and on the southwest by Laguna Seca Ranch and Fort Ord. The park entrance is approximately 6 miles east of the intersection of Highway 68 and State Highway 1 and is .4 miles west of the Highway 68/Laureles Grade Road intersection.
- 14. In March of 1975 the Monterey County Planning Commission recommended to the Board of Supervisors a proposed amendment to the Monterey Peninsula Area General Plan to include the LSRA as a regional park. The Board of Supervisors adopted this recommendation. The Monterey Peninsula Area Plan, adopted in 1966, is a sectional Land Use Plan of the County General Plan. The land uses surrounding LSRA include rural residential with an allowable density of one family per net acre to the west and to the south.
- 15. In 1983, the County developed a proposed use permit for LSRA and caused to be prepared and considered an EIR which addressed the impacts of the proposed use permit. Except for the provision quoted below, the EIR did not address the impacts of racing activities; instead,

it focused on the impacts of non-racing activities. Concerning noise from racing activities, the EIR stated:

"Development of proposed uses would not alter the level of race activity and noise generated along the raceway during a major race event would remain unchanged. Therefore, no change in raceway-related noise at existing residences would be anticipated."

In 1983, the County Planning Commission approved Use Permit No. 2991 {"Use Permit") governing the operation and general development of LSRA. The Use Permit specifies that five major (12,000 to 20,000 persons), six medium (5,000 to 12,000 persons) and 24 small (1,000 to 5,000 persons) event days may take place each calendar year at LSRA; however the Use Permit does not address or permit motor vehicle racing or racetrack rentals.

- Permit does not permit or regulate motor vehicle racing or race car driving at LSRA and only permits and regulates non-racing activities and events at LSRA. Petitioner is further informed and believes that, as activities not permitted by the Use Permit, motorcycle racing, race car driving and the racetrack rental program is, and has been treated by Respondents, as a non-conforming land use that existed prior to the transfer of the LSRA property to Monterey County from the U.S. Government in 1974.
- 17. In 1985, the County zoned LSRA as PQP-D-5, Public Quasi-Design Control-Scenic. Title 21, Chapter 21.40 of the Monterey Code sets forth the regulations for Public/ Quasi Public Zoning Districts. Motor vehicle racing and race car driving are neither allowed nor permitted uses. Such are not an allowable use pursuant to a use permit under the PQP-D-5 zoning.

- 18. Petitioner is informed and believes that, as activities not permitted by the applicable zoning, motor vehicle racing, race car driving and the racetrack rental program is, and has been treated by Respondents, as a non-conforming land use that existed prior to the transfer of the LSRA property to Monterey County from the U.S. Government in 1974.
- 19. From the inception of auto racing in 1957 until the approval of the Concession Agreement in 2023, Respondent County has entered seriatim into agreements with entities to operate and/or manage LSRA. The type of agreement for the operation of LSRA has changed over time. From 1957 to 1974, the Sports Car Racing Association of Monterey Peninsula (SCRAMP) leased the property from the Army and managed the track independently. In 1974, LSRA was deeded to the County and SCRAMP operated the facility under a long-term Concession Agreement. SCRAMP moved to a month-to-month Concession Agreement from March 2014 to January 1, 2017, and from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019, under a Management Agreement. In December of 2019, the County entered into a Management Agreement with A&D Narigi Consulting, LLC, ("A&D") with a term beginning January 1, 2020 and ending December 31, 2023.
- 20. Petitioner is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, the only environmental reviews of the operation of the LSRA, other than categorical exemptions, were undertaken in 1974 and in 1983. Environmental Impact Reports were prepared in each of those years. Neither of the reports focused on the impacts of motor vehicle racing and race car driving or assessed the sound generated from such activities.

21. The Concession Agreement approved in 2023 permits the same number of major, minor, and small events as was permitted in the 2020 A&D Agreement. However, the Concession Agreement doesn't contain any limitation on the number of event days. Unlike the 2020 A&D Agreement, the Concession Agreement states in pertinent part that:

"Contractor shall manage, operate and maintain the Concession Premises...in a manner reasonably designed to maximize revenue in the reasonable operation of Contractor's business in the Concession Premises, consistent with the terms of this Agreement. Contractor may use or permit the use of the Concession Premises for any purpose allowed under applicable law, including, but not limited to, historical usage of the Concession Premises under the Use Permit and prior Concession Premises management arrangements." (Bold type added for emphasis.)

The Concession Agreement contains no sound limitations on any motor vehicles including racecars, and it permits racetrack rental and the rental of the Paddock area when not used for events.

- 22. The term of the Concession Agreement expires on December 31, 2028 and contains provisions for two extensions of the agreement. In order to qualify for the first extension, the contractor (Friends) must expend \$10 million for capital improvements during the initial term and to qualify for the second extension, Friends must expend an additional \$40 million during the term of the first extension.
- 23. Petitioner is informed and believes and thereon alleges motor vehicle, race car events and rentals of the race track at Laguna Seca Raceway from 2021 thru 2023 have substantially increased compared to similar operations from 1974 until 2021. These increases include but are not limited to more racetrack event days, higher permitted noise levels, additional track rental days with intensified noise in excess of 100 dB, increased traffic, inadequate water supply and water quality, inadequate sewage disposal, and expansion of the camping grounds. Petitioner is further informed and believes the number of residences and residents adversely

affected by the increased noise and traffic has substantially increased since 1974. Also, Petitioner is further informed and believes and thereon alleges that under the Concession Agreement, the expanded uses and impacts relating thereto will continue and will increase through 2024 and beyond.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

ZONING VIOLATION INJUNCTIVE RELEIEF

- 24. The allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 23, inclusive, are incorporated herein as if fully set forth.
- 25. As stated in Paragraphs 16, 17, and 18, motor vehicle racing, race car driving and the racetrack rental program at LSRA is, and has been treated by Respondents, as a non-conforming land use. This non-conforming land use at LSRA is not permitted by the 1983 Use Permit nor by the applicable zoning of the LSRA.
 - 26. Section 21.68.020 of Respondent County's Zoning Code provides that:

 Any use of land, structure or land and structure which was legally established but is nonconforming to subsequently adopted land use regulations is a legal nonconforming use.
- 27. Section 21.68.020 and Section 21.68.020 B of Respondent County's Zoning Code provide in pertinent part that:

A legal nonconforming land use may be continued from the time that legal nonconforming land use is established, except that.

B. No such use may be intensified over the level of use that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established.

28. As stated in Paragraph 23, Petitioner is informed and believes and thereon alleges the motor vehicle racing events and rentals of the race track at LSRA from 2021 thru 2023 have

substantially increased compared to similar operations from 1974 until 2021. These increases include but are not limited to more racetrack event days, higher permitted noise levels, additional track rental days with intensified noise in excess of 100 dB, increased traffic, inadequate water supply and water quality, inadequate sewage disposal, and expansion of the camping grounds. Petitioner is further informed and believes that the number of residences and residents adversely affected by the increased noise and traffic has substantially increased since 1974. Also, Petitioner is further informed and believes and thereon alleges that under the Concession Agreement, the expanded uses and impacts relating thereto will continue and will increase thru 2024 and beyond.

- 29. In violation of Section 21.68.020.B of the Monterey County Zoning Code, the race car events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA have intensified and expanded over the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established when the applicable zoning was established in 1985.
- 30. Section 21.84.030 of the Monterey County Code, a part of the Title in the Code pertaining to zoning, provides in pertinent part that;
 - ...any use of any land, structure, or premises, established, conducted, operated, or maintained contrary to the provisions of this Chapter shall be, and the same is hereby declared to be, a violation of this Title, and a public nuisance.
- 31. The motor vehicle racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA that have intensified and expanded over the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established and are therefore a violation of Respondent County's Zoning ordinance and a public nuisance.
- 32. Respondent County's past, present, and future use of the racetrack at LSRA is not only a violation of the applicable zoning, but also is a public nuisance and has caused and will continue to cause irreparable injury not subject to money damages and, thus, must be enjoined.

An injunction, both preliminary and permanent should issue commanding Respondents and Real Parties in Interest to cease and desist from allowing motor vehicle racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA in excess of the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established when the applicable zoning was established which was in 1985.

33. Petitioner has suffered and will continue to suffer irreparable injury as a result of the continued violation of Respondents' zoning laws. Petitioner has no adequate remedy at law. Consequently Plaintiff is entitled to injunctive relief limiting the use of the race track to that authorized by law.

Wherefore Plaintiff seeks injunctive relief as set out below.

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

(CEQA VIOLATION)

- 34. Plaintiff incorporates by reference the allegations contained in Paragraphs 1-33 as though set out in full herein.
- 35. On July 18, 2023, Respondent Board adopted Resolution No. 23-244 which approved the Concession Agreement and which found that the adoption of the Concession Agreement is categorically exempt from environmental review under the CEQA pursuant to the "Existing Facilities" and the "Normal Operations of Facilities for Public Gatherings" exemptions set forth in the CEQA Guidelines, (California Code of Regulations) sections 15301 and 15323, respectively. Also, on July 18, 2023, Respondent Board directed County staff to file a Notice of Exemption.
- 36. CEQA Guidelines section 15301, which addresses the "existing facilities" exemption, provides:

...the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. (Bold added for emphasis.)

37. CEQA Guidelines section, which addresses the "normal operations" exemption provides:

"the normal operations of existing facilities for public gatherings for which the facilities were designed, where there is a past history of the facility being used for the same or similar kind of purpose. For the purposes of this section, "past history" shall mean that the same or similar kind of activity has been occurring for at least three years and that there is a reasonable expectation that the future occurrence of the activity would not represent a change in the operation of the facility. Facilities included within the exemption include, but are not limited to racetracks, stadiums, convention centers, auditoriums, amphitheaters, planetariums swimming pools and amusement parks. (Bold added for emphasis.)

38. Failure to Proceed in the Manner required by Law and Lack of Substantial Evidence

Respondent Board's approval of the Concession Agreement and its finding that the approval is categorically exempt from CEQA review constitutes a prejudicial abuse of discretion in that the finding that the decision is categorically exempt is not supported by substantial evidence and presents a failure to proceed in the manner required by law for the reasons set forth below.

a. Respondent Board did not provide an Adequate Project Description.

CEQA is premised on the inclusion of an accurate, stable and consistent description of the proposed project. (Guidelines, § 15124.) The project description must contain specific information about the project sufficient to allow a complete evaluation and review of its environmental impacts. Here, the "project" is based on past practices and historical uses, which is apparently the continuation of intensified and expanded motor vehicle racing events, rentals of

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the race track and noise levels at LSRA over the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established. However, the project description in the Respondent Board's findings is deficient in that it does not address the continuation of the intensified and expanded use which is a violation of the applicable zoning and constitutes a public nuisance.

Consequently, Respondent Board did not proceed in manner required by law.

b. The Approval of the Concession Agreement is not exempt from CEQA.

Under the "Existing Facilities" exemption, the validity of the exemption is contingent upon the project not causing a significant impact and on the project involving only a negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the approval of the project. These CEQA requirements are not met. Here, unlike its predecessor agreements, the Concession Agreement requires the contractor to "...manage, operate and maintain the Concession Premises...in a manner reasonably designed to maximize revenue." Further, in order to qualify for extensions of the Concession Agreement, the contractor must expend millions of dollars on capital improvements. In addition, based upon information and belief, the amount of revenue derived from racetrack rentals increases with the amount of noise allowed to be emitted from the motor vehicles. Given these circumstances, it is reasonably foreseeable that the contractor, under the Concession Agreement, will increase the already intensified and expanded racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA in the future. Thus, a fair argument exists that the additional noise increases will cause significant impacts on the residents and others in the vicinity of the LSRA.

Under the "normal operations" exemption, the validity of the exemption is contingent upon the project not causing a significant impact and there must be a reasonable expectation that the future occurrence of activities under the project will not represent a change in the operation

of the facility. These CEQA requirements are not met. For the same reasons presented in the preceding paragraph, there is a reasonable expectation that there will be a change in the operation of the LSRA in the form of intensified and expanded race car events, rentals of the race track and noise levels which leads to a fair argument that these changes will cause significant impacts on the residents and others in the vicinity of the LSRA.

For the foregoing reasons, Respondent Board did not proceed in the manner required by law and Respondent Board's finding that its approval of the Concession Agreement is categorically exempt from CEQA review is not supported by substantial evidence.

39. Unusual Circumstances.

The "existing facilities" and "normal operations" exemptions are not absolute. CEQA Guidelines section 15300 provides that even if it is determined that the project is otherwise eligible for one of those exemptions, both exemptions must be denied if there is a reasonable possibility of a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

40. Here, the project is based on past practices and historical uses, which is apparently the continuation of intensified and expanded motor vehicle racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA over the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established. These circumstances at LSRA are not only a violation of the applicable zoning, but also constitute a public nuisance. In the future, for the financial and other reasons presented in Paragraph 39.b, under the Concession Agreement, the intensification and expansion of motor vehicle racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA are reasonably foreseeable to increase in the future. Thus, there is a fair argument that this future intensification and expansion of the already existing zoning violation and public nuisance will

cause significant impacts on the environment, especially on the large population of residents and others in the vicinity of LSRA. Also, in addition to the intensification and expansion of the existing public nuisance, Petitioner is informed and believes that the potable water system at LSRA registers high arsenic levels and bottled water is currently required on the premises and that the septic system at LSRA does not have leach fields and dumps directly into holding tanks that are overtaxed. With additional spectators attending the expanded activities in the future, there is a fair argument that these deficiencies will cause additional significant impacts on the environment.

For the foregoing reasons, unusual circumstances exist which result in a reasonable possibility that that the project will cause a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, even if Respondent Board's finding that its approval of the Concession Agreement is categorically exempt from CEQA review under the "existing facilities" and "normal operations" exemptions in found to be legally sufficient, both of the exemptions should be denied because of unusual circumstances.

41. Petitioner has no adequate remedy at law, and unless and until this Court grants temporary and permanent relief, irreparable harm will occur in that Respondent County and the Real Parties In Interest will continue operation in violation of CEQA.

Petitioner is entitled to relief as set forth below.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Petitioner prays for judgment as follows:

First Cause of Action

1. For a temporary stay, temporary restraining order, and preliminary and permanent injunctions restraining Respondents and Real Parties in Interest and their representative agents,

servants, and employees, and all others acting in concert with Respondents or Real Parties in Interest on their behalf, to cease and desist from allowing motor vehicle racing events, rentals of the race track and noise levels at LSRA in excess of the level of use and noise that existed at the time the legal nonconforming use was established in 1985.

Second Cause of Action

- 2. For alternative and peremptory writs of mandate directing Respondents to vacate and set aside their approval of the Concession Agreement and to rescind Resolution 23-244.
- 3. For alternative and peremptory writs of mandate directing Respondents to rescind the Notice of Exemption for the Concession Agreement.
- 4. For alternative and peremptory writs of mandate directing the Respondents to comply with the requirements of CEQA and take any other action required by Public Resources Code Section 21168.9, comply with the requirements of CEQA and to comply with Monterey County Code Title 21.84.050 when reviewing any proposed Concession Agreement.

Both Causes of Action

- 5. For costs of the suit.
- 6. For Petitioner's attorneys' fees under Code of Civil Procedure Section 1021 .5 and other applicable authority; and,
 - 7. That this Court grant such other and further relief as is necessary, proper, and just.

DATED: December 11, 2023

RICHARD H. ROSENTHAL, ESO.

Ruhard A. Rosenthal

Attorney for Petitioner

VERIFICATION

STATE OF CALIFORNIA)

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COUNTY OF MONTEREY)

I; Michael Weaver, a member of Highway 68 Coalition, declare that it is a Plaintiff and

Petitioner herein. I have read the foregoing Complaint and Petition for Injunctive Relief and

Writ of Mandate and am familiar with the contents thereof which are true, except those matters

stated therein to be based upon information and belief and as to such matters; I believe them to

be true.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the

foregoing is true and correct.

Executed this 11th day of December, 2023 Salinas California

DV.

MICHAEL WEAVER

MEMBER HIGHWAY 68 COALITION

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