



August 24, 2021

Lisa Ketcham, Chair and Members  
San Mateo County Planning Commission  
455 County Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063

**Re: Agenda Item 3 on the August 25 Agenda: PLN 2019-00429, Vida Verde Nature Education, Inc. Applicant. Coastal Development Permit, Planned Agricultural District Permit and Farm Labor Housing Permit for overnight camp for low-income students**

Dear Chair Ketcham and Commissioners,

On behalf of Green Foothills, I write with great enthusiasm in support of the above-referenced project that will allow Vida Verde to better serve the most disadvantaged youth in San Mateo County and beyond. Many of these students have neither the resources nor the opportunity to experience nature and learn about where their food comes from.

Vida Verde provides free nature-based education specifically for youth from low-income families and communities who would not otherwise have the opportunity to visit, learn from, and enjoy the redwood forests, creeks, ocean beaches, and working farms on the San Mateo coast.

I have been advising Vida Verde over the past several years as to how their proposed facilities, including the new well, barn, and associated structures/improvements, can be located and designed to comply with the relevant policies in the County's Local Coastal Program (LCP). We concur with the Staff's conclusion that the project, as conditioned, conforms with the plans, policies, and standards of the applicable policies of the Land Use Plan policies and Planned Agricultural District zoning regulations.

We recommend approval of the CDP, PAD and Farm Labor Housing Permits for this inspiring project that has worked tirelessly to address institutional injustice and in many instances, has literally changed lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lennie Roberts".

Lennie Roberts, Legislative Advocate, Green Foothills

Planning Commission  
San Mateo County, California  
08-22-2021  
Item 3, PLN 2019-00429

Marina Stariha  
3550 La Honda Road,  
San Gregorio, Ca 94074  
650-747-0017

Dear Planning Commissioners:

I feel like the Lorax for San Gregorio Creek: mean because I object to the development of a camp for underserved children, but I do so to protect the creek and its wildlife.

For 45 years I have observed the degradation of the creek which supported good numbers of spawning steelhead and Coho salmon even after the 1976-78 drought, to very few fish today. The degradation is caused by development along the creek and its watershed with all the attendant pollution, silting, tree shading loss and increased water use<sup>1</sup>.

The mission of the Vida Verde Program is honorable, but their stewardship of the land is questionable. Numerous large trees were cut March and April, 2020 to provide summer teen camp space. Pit toilets were used by students, staff and visitors for years. Numerous unpermitted structures have been built which will remain according to the development plan. This proposal renamed the overnight guest structure "garden shed", and the two bedroom residential yurt "storage yurt". They are all extremely flammable. They have blocked the natural overflow behind the present residence which might impede high water flow and cause flooding upstream. The parking spaces for three buses and several cars are within ten feet of the creek bank.

They have lost my trust as stewards of the land.

The proposed structures are all in support of operations of the camp and events. Not for nature conservation. The development and its inevitable use should be perceived as a whole. Imagine, for example, thirty children and their teachers doing creek walks disturbing spawning fish and their redds and other wildlife. It is obvious the environment will be impacted.

Six plus permanent residents, 30 students, 4 daily office staff and guests at events will have a huge ongoing impact on water supply of the property itself, and the neighboring wells. The waste water resulting from intense human use of the five acres of prime soil, will pollute the creek that surrounds the "project". Perhaps, not E. Coli, but dissolved chemicals in human waste and other human water use is extremely difficult to treat. There is also the livestock waste runoff to consider. All in all, it is a much bigger biological load than waste from one or even two residences.

# VIDA VERDE *at Hidden Creek*



A HOME FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

August 16, 2021

San Mateo County Planning Commission  
c/o Janneth Lujan, Planning Commission Secretary  
455 County Center, 2nd Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: Vida Verde Coastal Development Permit, Item 3, August 25, 2021 Agenda

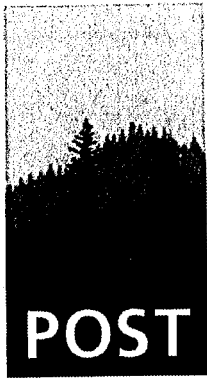
Dear Commissioners Santacruz, Ramirez, Gupta, Ketchum, and Hansson,

Hey hey hey! I am humbled to be writing to you in the esteemed position of stewardship and decision making that you have in our world. I am one of the founders of Vida Verde, an outdoor education program for youth at low-income schools in San Mateo County and beyond. We at Vida Verde Nature Education are pleased to have our Hidden Creek Outdoor Camp project before you at your August 25th meeting. We have sought to address all County concerns and requirements - because they are our concerns as well – and respectfully request your approval.

More about Vida Verde - you may know about San Mateo Outdoor Education - they have been teaching kids about the Coast for many years. But it turns out that many schools cannot afford the cost of attending SMOE. That is where Vida Verde comes in - to serve those kids that otherwise do not get the chance to come- 15,000 so far, and counting. Our mission is to get ALL the citizens of San Mateo County out on the beautiful trails, beaches and campgrounds for their health, education and enjoyment.

We work with 5th grade kids from the city - about 750 each year - who didn't grow up like some of us did. Before they come on one of our 3-day trips, most don't know what a redwood tree is, haven't seen the ocean, and don't know if the boy or girl chicken lays the eggs. Our students get to come out to the Coast to experience its highlights. We milk goats, hike in Sam McDonald County Park, cook and eat together, and students discover their potential and strengths. We encourage you to watch our video that shows our program from the kids' perspective at <https://www.vveducation.org/film>.

For the last 21 years, we have had to move our overnight camp from place to place on the San Mateo Coast, each time using resources that could instead have gone to our important youth work. In 2015, with extensive donor and volunteer support, we were able to purchase a farm property in San Gregorio to serve as our camp home base. In 2017, we worked with the Peninsula Open Space Trust and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to purchase two nearby properties to provide housing for Vida Verde teaching staff.



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Sanjay Vaswani

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Ken Yeager

Kimberly Young

**President**

Walter T. Moore

March 31, 2021

Lisa Ketcham, Chair  
Mario Santacruz, Vice Chair  
Manuel Ramirez Jr., Commissioner  
Kumkum Gupta, Commissioner  
Lisa Ketcham, Commissioner  
Frederick Hansson, Commissioner

San Mateo County Planning Commission  
455 County Center, 2nd Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063

**RE: Vida Verde Education Center Barn**

Dear San Mateo County Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), I would like to express our strong support for Vida Verde and their planned Education Center Barn in San Gregorio. Since our founding in 1977, POST has protected over 80,000 acres of open space across the San Francisco Peninsula and Santa Cruz Mountains, including numerous farms and ranches on the San Mateo coast.

Vida Verde has inspired and educated thousands of Bay Area youth about the importance of agriculture and natural lands over the past 20 years. We are thrilled for Vida Verde to embark on this long awaited next step in developing their facilities to support their farm staff and programs – which show hundreds of kids each year how to milk goats, make cheese, raise chickens, cultivate an orchard, and grow vegetables on Vida Verde's 23-acre parcel in San Gregorio.

We are lucky to have a non-profit like Vida Verde in the heart of coastal San Mateo County. They are responsible stewards of the land and undertake the important task of connecting youth from urban areas with our agricultural and natural lands. POST has successfully partnered with Vida Verde in the past and we know that their planned facilities improvements will allow their programs to flourish.

POST would like to thank the San Mateo County Planning Commission for considering approval of Vida Verde's Education Center Barn.

Sincerely,

Walter T. Moore  
President



2707 KIPLING STREET  
HOUSTON, TX 77098  
213-278-0855 TEL

LOUISLBORICKFOUNDATION.ORG  
GRANTS@LLBFUNDATION.ORG

To: Mario Santacruz, Manuel Ramirez Jr., Kumkum Gupta, Lisa Ketcham, and Frederick Hansson

I am writing in support of Vida Verde's Education Center Barn. My family's foundation has been a donor to Vida Verde for the past 8 years. From our first phone conversation, we knew the founders, Laura and Shawn, were very special people. The program they had developed offered young people something many had missed: a link to the outdoor environment and the opportunity to learn and enjoy new, positive experiences in a setting that many had never imagined.

Vida Verde offers youth from underserved Bay Area communities the opportunity to experience the outdoors in a 3-day overnight program. For many, this trip is the first time they've seen the ocean or the redwoods. The location in San Mateo County and San Gregorio gives the students access to beautiful land, parks and beaches where they can explore all that nature has to offer.

On our first visit to the main site, we were excited to walk down nature's path to the clearing where we saw students smiling and learning in this very special place. Students sat under a tree while their instructor led them in a lesson on how to work together with each other and in harmony with nature. It was obvious to us that Vida Verde's program offered something life-changing to many of these young people. The farm and the property were magical. We knew our donation to Vida Verde would be well used. It was obvious when we saw the program and property with our own eyes that the Vida Verde team and staff are well-equipped to carry out their goal of educational equity to so many deserving youth.

We support their work and will continue to do so through our donations. We want to help them move forward with this project, so that their program can continue to benefit the youth of San Mateo County and the surrounding San Francisco Bay area. The impact the Educational Center Barn will have on these students is beyond measurement in dollars. The barn is the final piece Vida Verde needs to complete their vision of creating an environment where students can thrive for many years to come. They say, "If we build it, they will come." We say, let's do it!

Thank you for your time,

*Linda Borick*

Linda Borick  
Director, The Louis L. Borick Foundation

## **Darrow Feldstein, M.S.**

Educator | Facilitator | Community Organizer

Dear San Mateo County Planning Commissioners Mario Santacruz, Manuel Ramirez Jr., Kumkum Gupta, Lisa Ketcham, Frederick Hansson,

My name is Darrow Feldstein and I am a bay area resident writing to you in support of Vida Verde Nature Education's proposed barn project. I have been involved with Vida Verde for 7 years as a volunteer, donor, and community supporter and have been floored by the value this organization brings to the greater bay area community. They are a rare organization that stands true to their values and actively works to support young people who would not normally have opportunities to participate in transformational outdoor personal development programming. I have supported them this long and will continue to do so for the long haul.

Vida Verde has successfully garnered long-term support from hundreds of families throughout the region and continually serves as a responsive, supportive community space. Their site at Hidden Creek has already been placed fondly into the hearts and memories of young people throughout the bay area. The staff at Vida Verde clearly has a keen eye for stewardship. They have developed a verdant, peaceful atmosphere that is welcoming and nourishing to all who come. Children time and again are magnetically brought in to the place and their immediate relaxation and relief is palpable. I believe strongly in the importance of having places that serve as safe havens for community members—especially young people—to come to for opportunities for learning, respite, and rejuvenation. Vida Verde's site at Hidden Creek is just that.

I believe in Vida Verde's ability to plan thoughtfully and intentionally and I recognize their strong team of members with expertise and foresight. In sum, I kindly request that you support their plans for continuing to build infrastructure in support of their mission and vision to support young people who would not normally have access to places and experiences like those offered at Vida Verde.

Thanks very much,  
Darrow Feldstein



Dear San Mateo County Planning Commissioners Mario Santacruz, Manuel Ramirez Jr., Kumkum Gupta, Lisa Ketcham, and Frederick Hansson,

We are donors to the extraordinary non-profit Vida Verde in Pescadero and am writing to support their efforts to build a

barn on their property at Hidden Creek.

Vida Verde's program for children is transformational, giving disadvantaged school kids what is often their first experience

in nature. And the program dovetails with so much of what many of us in this region understand early: to love the natural

world, one must first experience it.

Vida Verde gives children opportunities to experience feeling safe in the great outdoors, lets them play and explore the

woods and shore, teaches them about strengths they never knew they had, helps them gain an appreciation of the

natural world, and shows them where food comes from and how it's connected to us. This is nature/conservation/

environmental education equity on a level not quite seen before in our area.

If you're not familiar with Vida Verde, this video is a good introduction: <https://www.vveducation.org/>

Best regards,

Nancy Reyerling

Marty Walker

1820 Portola Road

Woodside CA 94062

650-851-4058

JEFF BUTTERWORTH  
511 CENTRAL AVE.  
PETALUMA, CA,  
94952

(FREDERICK HANSSON)  
(LISA KETCHUM)  
(KUMKUM GUPTA)  
(MANUEL RAMIREZ JR.)  
(MARIO SANTACRUZ)  
3/11/2021

DEAR SAN MATEO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS,

I HOPE THIS LETTER FINDS YOU WELL. I AM WRITING YOU IN REGARDS TO VIDA VERDE NATURE EDUCATION, A SMALL YET MIGHTY NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT CALLS SAN GREGORIO HOME.

SINCE 2001 VIDA VERDE HAS BEEN CONNECTING YOUTH WITH NATURE BY PROVIDING FREE, OVERNIGHT, ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENTS WHO OTHERWISE <sup>MIGHT</sup> NOT GET THE EXPERIENCE.

I BEGAN WORKING FOR VIDA VERDE IN 2015 WHEN I JOINED THEIR TEAM AS AN INSTRUCTOR FOR THEIR PROGRAM. ~~IT~~

~~IT~~ IT IS HARD FOR ME TO FIND THE RIGHT LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE THE FEELING MYSELF AND THE STUDENTS SHARED WHEN, ~~IT~~ ALTHOUGH THEY LIVED ONLY 40 MINS AWAY, THEY LAID EYES ON THE PACIFIC OCEAN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES! "IT'S HUGE!!!", "IT SMELLS SO SALTY!!", "CAN WE TOUCH THE WATER???" "IT DOESN'T LOOK REAL!" THESE ARE JUST A FEW MEMORABLE RESPONSES IN MY MIND AT THE MOMENT.

I WOULD GO ON TO WORK AT VIDA VERDE FOR A TOTAL OF 5 YEARS, SERVING AS THEIR PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND MEMORIES LIKE THESE IN THE REDWOODS, AT THE FARM SITE, AND IN THE KITCHEN AT CAMP WERE A WEEKLY OCCURENCE

ACCESS TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT OUTDOOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE NATION IF WE EXPECT THEM TO BE RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE FUTURE



San Mateo County Planning Commission  
455 County Center  
Redwood City, CA 94063

March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

Re: Vida Verde Education Center Barn  
3540 La Honda Rd, San Gregorio 94074

Dear Commissioners Santacruz, Ramirez Jr, Gupta, Ketcham, and Hansson:

We are neighbors of Vida Verde on La Honda Road and have been acquainted with Shawn, Laura and their staff since they began programs at the Optimist Center next to our house in 2009. We were immediately impressed with their program, their dedication, and their love for bringing nature into the lives of young people. Their impact was readily apparent as we listened weekly to the joyful noise of students and teachers alike wafting through the air.

As former director and current board president of the San Gregorio Environmental Resource Center which works to protect and preserve habitat in the San Gregorio Watershed through education and outreach to the community, our organization welcomed Vida Verde's permanent move to its present location in San Gregorio in 2011. They have worked continuously to improve and expand their program and their impact on the lives of our children. While this area is replete with summer camps and retreats, few combine such a great educational program with outdoor recreation.

The site at Hidden Creek is perfect for Vida Verde's brand of outdoor education. It's large and level with room for planting gardens, raising animals, and hikes along San Gregorio Creek. Shawn and Laura's philosophy of preserving, protecting, and celebrating local flora and fauna is a fabulous asset to our community and our watershed. We're pleased to observe the continual and careful improvements Vida Verde makes to the property. The addition of the Education Center Barn will be a perfect complement to their vision and their programs.

We urge you to support this project.



Mary & Neil Panton  
5350 La Honda Rd  
San Gregorio, CA 94074

Dear Commissioners: Santacruz, Ramirez Jr., Gupta, Ketcham, and Hansson,

My name is Kyle Macdonald, and I am a 20+ year veteran outdoor educator, non-profit executive and former employee of Vide Verde, writing in support of their work to build an education center barn on their property in San Gregorio.

Before I came to work at Vide Verde, I was impressed with their mission, to provide free environmental education to Bay Area students that would not otherwise experience the power and beauty of nature: redwoods, a vibrant farm and the amazing coast of California. Once I became an employee, I was even more impressed. The attention and care that is taken, to provide every student with a truly magical experience cannot be overstated.

What's more, the property is a place that draws you in, and provides food, through the working, educational farm; a waterway, as the creek flows by, providing a beautiful, background sound; and farm animals- goats and chickens- that provide life and learning, milk and eggs for urban children, who arrive with wonder.

Such a place, that represents the best of what San Mateo has to offer its residents and visitors should be cherished and supported.

It is with excitement and hope that I write to offer my full support for the building of the education center barn.

Sincerely,

Kyle Macdonald

**March 14, 2021**

## **SAN MATEO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS,**

Mario Santacruz, Manuel Ramirez Jr., Kumkum Gupta, Lisa Ketcham, & Frederick Hansson

Dear San Mateo County Planning Commissioners,

The contributions Laura, Sean, and the entire Vida Verde team have made on a generation of students are countless and priceless. Let's equip them to facilitate another generation of educational impact with the Education Center Barn.

I have been involved with Vida Verde since their beginning in September of 2001. I formerly served on their advisory board, and my role was an advocate for the students. I am writing to advocate again for the students. Through the experiential education at Vida Verde, students learn lessons that are unteachable elsewhere. I am a former Outdoor Education teacher, and a native of the beautiful redwoods of San Mateo county. I was raised in the Tunitas Creek watershed, and I am honored to share our natural treasures with students through Vida Verde.

In addition to experiencing nature, students from San Mateo County and beyond engage growth, imagination, leadership, empowerment and transformation through the experiential education at Vida Verde. Let's build an education center to nourish and flourish our students.

SINCERELY,

DAVID MOSGOFIAN KOEKER



Karen and Ned Gilhuly  
376 Mountain Home Court  
Woodside, CA 94062

March 27, 2021

Dear Commissioners Santacruz, Ramirez, Gupta, Ketcham and Hansson,

We write to express our deep appreciation of Vida Verde's Outdoor Education Program and to offer our support for the recent effort to improve their facilities.

There is a standard of excellence that Vida Verde's staff brings to everything they do. The students (and their families) of San Mateo County have long benefited from the outstanding curriculum Vida Verde provides and their commitment to giving children the most positive experience possible. As they welcome children who have had limited exposure to nature to Hidden Creek - this very special spot they've nurtured over the years - and immerse them in the wonders of nature, it can have a profound effect. Young people learn to appreciate the fragility and strength of the Earth which can lead them to become the stewards we so desperately need. They find inner strength and clarity in a way being in nature with trusted adults to guide you can only provide.

Vida Verde has offered this experience to our underserved communities for many years and have managed to create meaningful moments in spite of the many challenges presented by their facilities. The creation of the barn will allow them to enhance their programming and improve the outcomes for our children for years to come. The design of the barn has been deeply considered so that it may be a multi-purpose building while still blending into the topography and the spirit of the location.

We have watched Shawn and Laura Sears shepherd Vida Verde for a long time and have personally supported their efforts. We have also brought their work to the

FROM THE DESK OF

**CHERIE GILLETTE SIGWARD**

Sunday, March 14, 2021

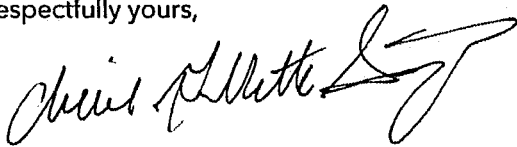
To: Mario Sanchez  
Manuel Ramirez, Jr.  
KuKum Gupta  
Lisa Ketcham  
Frederick Hansson

My family and I have been supporters of Vida Verde for just a little over a year but we could not be more enthusiastic about their mission. We are interested in K-12 education, conservation, and the environment and we were introduced to Vida Verde because they are the perfect intersection of those concerns.

Because of the Covid crisis we have been unable to visit Hidden Creek in person but Shawn Sears was able to give us a virtual tour and we were so impressed with the progress they've made, even during the pandemic. We got a chance to meet their entire team during their amazing December fundraiser. As a family we are making a significant (for us) donation towards the construction of the Education Center Barn. We feel that it is intrinsic to the progress VV is making towards building educational equity for the youth of San Mateo County.

We plan to continue to support Vida Verde and hope your committee will do the same.

Respectfully yours,



**Katie and Eric Ryan**  
**326 San Francisco Blvd.**  
**San Anselmo, CA 94960**

March 13, 2021

Dear San Mateo County Planning Commissioners:

We're writing to ask that you approve the plans for an Education Center Barn at Vida Verde Nature Education at 3540 La Honda Road in San Gregorio.

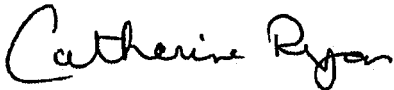

It's our guess that this letter will be one of many that you'll receive in support of this project. *We -- like hundreds/thousands of others within the Bay Area -- are enthusiastic supporters of Vida Verde's work. **We've been supporting them every year since 2003.***

Vida Verde presents the perfect double-whammy of nonprofit effectiveness. First, they provide excellent programming that consistently gets high marks from their participants and accolades from their deep bench of funders. Second, they run a tight ship, following simple and practical processes that ensure that their staff, operations, and financials run smoothly.

By approving that the Education Center Barn be built on their property, you'll be helping to guarantee that Vida Verde will, for decades to come, continue to have a transformative impact on the lives of San Mateo County's youth that otherwise wouldn't have access to those types of environmental experiences.

We fully support Vida Verde in the building of the Education Center Barn. We ask that you do the same.

Sincerely,

Katie and Eric Ryan

**TOMKAT**  
RANCH  
— K —  
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Vida Verde  
Attn: Let's Build a Barn  
3540 La Honda Road  
San Gregorio, CA 94074  
[Jessica@VVeducation.org](mailto:Jessica@VVeducation.org)

Dear Mario Santacruz, Manuel Ramirez, Jr., Kumkum Gupta, Lisa Ketcham, and Frederick Hansson,

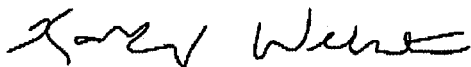
I'm writing to you in support of Vida Verde's recent submittal for building an Education Center Barn on their farm property in San Gregorio.

TomKat Ranch is an educational ranch in Pescadero (San Mateo County) with a mission to raise healthy food on working lands in a way that regenerates the planet and inspires others to grow a just, thriving, and resilient food system for all. Over the last several years we have partnered and supported Vida Verde in their educational programs to provide outdoor experiences for students who don't have access or get the opportunity to connect with nature and the environment.

Prior to COVID-19, we have collaborated with Vida Verde in offering an add-on experience to spend time with ornithologists who perform bird counts on TomKat Ranch. We've also been able to experience their programs and see first-hand the impact these learning experiences have on the students-- learning about native flora and fauna; preparing a meal from food harvested in the garden; touching the ocean for their first time. A program like Vida Verde is such an important asset in the Bay Area, as it allows students to experience science, ecology, and agriculture in real-time and hands-on.

The space at Hidden Creek is magical and special for people of all ages. This is a space that Vida Verde utilizes as an outdoor classroom to students who often live in cities and never experienced nature or aren't allowed to go outside for safety reasons. Providing this space and approving the building of an Education Center Barn will enable Vida Verde to continue to host programs that provide educational equity for years to come.

Sincerely,



Kathy Webster  
Food Advocacy Manager/LeftCoast GrassFed Manager