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San Bernardino County Planning
Commission
County Government Center
385 N. Arrowhead Avenue
San Bernardino, CA 92415

RE: Church of the Woods Appeal

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Church of the Woods Project. I am a PhD candidate in ecology at the University of Connecticut, a NASA FINESST recipient as well as a project team member for NASA's BioSCape biodiversity field mission. As an ecologist whose expertise is in fire-prone ecosystems and having grown up in nearby Redlands, I find the proposed project both professionally and personally troubling for the following reasons:

- **Grossly inadequate assessment of the project's cumulative environmental impacts.** As mentioned in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) the cumulative impacts of the project are both "significant and unavoidable." The county planning commission seems to ignore this designation in their decision making and avoid defining what the significant impacts are. The commission needs to consider the proposed project in terms of what is currently occurring in the county. Wildfires are increasing in both frequency and severity in California. A primary driver in this trend is growing human contact with fire prone areas. Minimizing construction and human activity in and nearby wilderness areas is an effective policy that can slow the rate of wildfires for the future as well as minimize harmful environmental impacts and their associated tax burden to local communities. Further, as wildfires stress the region's ecosystems, wildlife corridors such as the one located within the proposed project area become ever more important as animals move from burnt areas to unburnt refugia. The FEIR drastically underestimates the importance of these areas in light of foreseeable trends.
- **Distressing lack of a justification for alternative planning options.** The FEIR assumes that the only development alternative is a 10,000 square foot warehouse and does not give justification as to why a "no project" option was not considered. It seems that the planning commission has made a foregone conclusion that the land must be developed and is willfully ignoring any options that would yield the highest environmental benefits to the community. Moreover, if there was a community need for recreational and worship spaces why did the commission fail to make an effort to provide alternatives based on already developed sites? It seems odd that this project would be proposed within the county industrial district. The current proposal alternatives seem like a failure of imagination on the commission's part.

- **Negligible consideration of public benefits to the broader constituents that the commission serves.** The total costs of the project as listed in the FEIR range from environmental damage to severely impacted traffic conditions and continuing need for fire mitigation. These costs affect all citizens within the county. However, the benefits of the project only seem to go to a minority of people associated with the religious entity advocating for the project. I cannot see how the commission can defend the practice of providing benefits to a small group of people at the cost of the entire community as good governance.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Frye