

Attachment PC 4

Environmental Nature Center Letter

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May 6, 2026

City of Newport Beach City Council
100 Civic Center Drive
Newport Beach, CA 92660

Dear Mayor and Members of the City Council,

We are writing to provide an update regarding the proposed residential development at 1501 E. 16th Street, adjacent to the Environmental Nature Center (ENC) and the ENC Nature Preschool. Since our previous correspondence with the City, representatives of the ENC have participated in four meetings with the proposed developer, DR Horton, in an effort to discuss potential mitigation measures and better understand the project and its potential impacts. These meetings took place on May 29, 2025, August 14, 2025, December 4, 2025, and March 18, 2026.

We appreciate the opportunity for dialogue. However, despite these discussions, many of our core concerns remain unresolved. While recent meetings have included discussion of potential adjustments to the project, it is important to clarify that the ENC has not reached agreement with the developer and does not currently support the project as proposed. We remain open to continued dialogue, but the project in its current form continues to present significant concerns for our organization, our programs, and the thousands of children and families we serve each year.

The ENC's concerns fall into three primary categories:

- **Safety and security of the children, families, and visitors who use our campus**
- **Protection of the environmental integrity of our site and educational mission**
- **Compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood and the long-standing community institution that the ENC represents**

The following issues summarize the ENC's concerns and the status of discussions to date.

1. **Building Height and Massing:** Three-story buildings with rooftop decks directly adjacent to the ENC campus would fundamentally and adversely alter the area's visual and environmental character, undermining the proven educational and human health benefits of an immersive natural setting, reducing program effectiveness and revenue, and creating shading and privacy impacts for ENC habitat and educational spaces. While the ENC recognizes that the required density under the state housing element is 20 units per acre, there is no mandate specifying building height. The developer has proposed a building height of 43.4 feet, which would have a substantial and detrimental effect on the ENC, eroding the sense of openness, affecting established programming, and intruding upon the integrity of the outdoor educational environment cultivated over the past 54 years. To date, the developer has provided no evidence that three-story construction would avoid material impacts to the center or preschool, and has refused to install story poles or meaningfully implement measures that would allow for proper evaluation or mitigation of these impacts. To protect the ENC's character and function, any development bordering the ENC campus should be limited to a maximum of two stories, designed to preserve sightlines into and from the ENC, and must exclude rooftop decks entirely.

Update: During the March 18, 2026 meeting, the developer indicated that the proposed building height has been reduced from 45.1 feet to 43.4 feet. While we acknowledge this adjustment, the overall massing and proximity of the buildings remain our most prominent concern. The ENC also requested that story poles be installed on the property so that the community and decision-makers could better understand the visual impact of the proposed building height and massing. DR Horton refused to place story poles on the property. Notification of this decision was received via email from Cora Newman on January 21, 2026.



2. Setbacks: The ENC requested a 30-foot setback along the entirety of the ENC’s properties, including both the ENC campus and the ENC Nature Preschool. Adequate setbacks are necessary to provide space for vegetation buffers, protect program areas, and minimize long-term operational impacts.

Update: The developer has not honored this request. Current plans indicate a 10.5-foot setback along the ENC property line and 20 feet along the preschool property line, with portions of the parking lot and hammerhead turnaround intruding into the setback area.

3. Landscaping and Ecological Buffer: A comprehensive landscaping and reforestation plan featuring California native species should be developed in partnership with the ENC. This plan should prioritize ecological compatibility with the restored habitat areas on the ENC campus.

Update: We have concerns regarding certain proposed plant and tree species, although we appreciate that several of the species currently identified are native and appropriate. During recent discussions, the developer indicated that they are willing to look at drafting HOA language requiring any dead trees to be replaced with the same species and size to maintain the landscape along the property boundary. While we appreciate this concept, additional discussion is needed regarding species selection and long-term maintenance responsibilities.

4. Visual Privacy and Line of Sight: A line-of-sight study should be conducted to ensure that no direct sightlines exist into ENC educational spaces or preschool areas. The ENC strongly opposes rooftop decks or other elevated viewing areas that would overlook our campus.

Update: During the December 4, 2025 meeting, the ENC learned for the first time that second-floor balconies were proposed for the units facing ENC property, raising significant concerns regarding privacy and noise impacts. During the March 18 meeting, the developer indicated that balconies had been removed from five units facing the ENC log area, but not from the first unit closest to the ENC’s Gateway Area, and not from the other units facing the ENC. They stated they may consider removing balconies from all units facing the ENC.

The developer has also indicated that rooftop decks will not be removed but have been moved to the opposite (east-facing) side of the units rather than facing the ENC; however, this does not address the overall height concerns, as the rooftop stair enclosures (“doghouses”) would still reach approximately 43.4 feet in height. The ENC continues to believe that balconies, patios, rooftop decks, and other exposed or elevated outdoor spaces on units along the ENC property line should be eliminated entirely to reduce privacy, noise, and visual impacts on our educational programs and natural setting.

5. Utilities and Lighting: Utility placement, HVAC equipment, and lighting must be designed to prevent noise and light intrusion into ENC program areas and wildlife habitat.

Update: The developer has not indicated any planned modifications to the proposed utility placement, HVAC equipment, or lighting design addressing these concerns at this time.

6. Drainage: Stormwater drainage must be directed away from ENC property, preschool areas, and restored habitat zones.

Update: The developer has indicated that drainage will be directed toward 16th Street and away from ENC property.

7. Boundary Wall Height and Design: The fence or wall separating the ENC from the development should be the maximum allowable height to provide adequate screening, safety, and visual buffering. In addition, wall materials should be aesthetically compatible with the natural character of the ENC campus.

Update: The ENC has requested that the perimeter barrier be constructed of aesthetically compatible opaque materials—such as faux rock or wood similar to the fencing installed along the ENC’s boundary with the Newport Harbor High School softball field—to better reflect the natural character of the ENC campus. The developer has indicated that they intend to install a metal fence that appears more institutional in nature. They have also stated that the wall along the preschool property line cannot exceed 8 feet due to City requirements and that they do not wish to exceed 10 feet along the ENC property line because they believe taller barriers may make residents feel imprisoned. Given the unique circumstances of being directly adjacent to a preschool and environmental education campus, the ENC continues to believe that a taller perimeter barrier and more appropriate materials are necessary to provide adequate screening, safety,

and visual buffering. It is unclear whether the HOA will be required to maintain the boundary wall height and opaque materials.

8. Parking Impacts: The proposed development includes only nine visitor parking spaces, which is the minimum allowed. The ENC is concerned that insufficient visitor parking may result in overflow parking within ENC properties and neighborhood lots.

Update: The developer has indicated that they do not plan to modify the current proposal in response to this concern.

9. Construction Mitigation: A detailed construction mitigation plan must address noise, air quality, asbestos removal, and program disruption. Because the majority of ENC educational programming occurs outdoors, construction impacts could significantly affect our ability to operate safely.

Update: The developer has not indicated any planned modifications or mitigation measures addressing these concerns.

10. Traffic Safety: Traffic along 16th Street has increased significantly over time. Additional vehicle trips associated with construction and future residents could further strain this corridor and impact pedestrian safety.

Update: The developer has not indicated any proposed changes or mitigation measures related to traffic impacts.

11. Environmental Impact: The proposed development sits adjacent to restored native habitat that has taken decades to establish. Potential shading, root intrusion, and habitat disruption must be evaluated through a full environmental assessment.

Update: The developer has not indicated any planned modifications or environmental mitigation measures addressing these concerns at this time.

12. Gateway Area Protection: Buildings proposed directly adjacent to the ENC's Gateway Area—which includes outdoor classrooms, teaching stations, and an amphitheater—present significant operational concerns. A revised site plan could relocate several residential units currently proposed near the Gateway Area to reduce impacts on this important educational space.

Update: The developer has not indicated any planned modifications to the site plan addressing these concerns at this time.

13. Construction Timeline and Operational Planning: The ENC has requested a clearer understanding of the construction timeline and major phases so we can plan programs, camps, and events accordingly.

Update: The developer has not provided additional information regarding the construction timeline or phasing.

14. Monetary Donation & Mission Impact: A contribution of \$2.5 million to the ENC endowment upon the issuance of the building permit to help mitigate the short- and long-term impacts on our educational and conservation programs.

Update: Rather than engaging in meaningful discussion about how to mitigate the very real impacts on our work—including reduced foot traffic, decreased program participation, lower event attendance, and loss of revenue—the developer, specifically Dan Boyd, dismissed our request and labeled it “extortion.” They have also threatened legal action, publicly disparaged our organization, attempted to intimidate us, and have barely stepped foot into our facility. This is deeply troubling. Our only goal is to protect the long-term viability of our educational mission and continue being good neighbors—for the benefit of the Newport Beach community as a whole.

The \$2.5 million we requested is not arbitrary. The construction phase alone, projected to last 18–24 months, will severely limit our ability to offer camps, community programs, field trips, and facility rentals—key revenue sources that fund our staff salaries and operations. The concern of preschool families regarding the safety of their children both during construction and after occupancy is justifiable and the potential of enrollment withdrawal is real. The requested funds would allow us to retain our team and continue our efforts to provide educational opportunities to underserved student groups during this challenging period. Additionally, the ENC has already planted mature trees with irrigation on our preschool slope and gaps within the nature center property line to provide additional visual privacy and to mitigate the

lasting impact of the development's presence. These efforts are costly but essential. DR Horton has indicated they are willing to provide funding for additional ENC landscape but at an amount far below the estimated losses projected.

Concerns Regarding Negotiation Pressure

We also believe it is important to document the tone of portions of our recent discussions. During recent meetings, representatives of the developer indicated that the concessions currently under discussion could be withdrawn if the ENC does not take a neutral or supportive position regarding the project in the near future. Additionally, they referenced having received multiple offers from other potential developers and suggested that alternative development scenarios could be less favorable to the ENC. In this context, the developer also raised the possibility that if the current project does not proceed, the property could potentially be redeveloped as apartments, which could present a different development scenario.

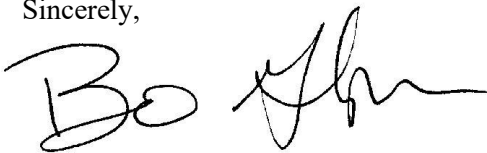
We want to be clear that the ENC's position is not driven by negotiation pressure or hypothetical alternatives, but rather by our responsibility to protect the safety of the children we serve, the environmental integrity of our campus, and the long-term viability of our educational mission.

The Environmental Nature Center has served the Newport Beach community for more than five decades, providing environmental education, habitat restoration, and meaningful connections to nature for tens of thousands of children and families each year. Given the proximity of this project to an environmental education facility serving thousands of children annually, we believe the issues outlined above warrant careful review during the City's environmental and entitlement processes. Projects of this scale and intensity immediately adjacent to a long-standing environmental education campus raise serious concerns regarding compatibility with existing community uses.

While we remain open to continued dialogue, it is important for the City Council to understand that the ENC has not reached agreement with the developer and that substantial concerns remain unresolved after four meetings.

We appreciate your continued attention to this matter and your consideration of the long-term impacts this development may have on one of Newport Beach's most valued educational and environmental resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bo Glover", written in a cursive style.

Bo Glover, President & CEO
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