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Judge: UC Santa Cruz failed to gauge impact of enrollment growth

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5–6 minutes



UC Santa Cruz students walking on campus, on April 29, 2024.

Credit: Kevin Painchaud/Lookout Santa Cruz

Quick take:

A Santa Cruz County Superior Court judge published a decision on Monday in favor of the City of Santa Cruz in a lawsuit filed against the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the UC Board of Regents. City of Santa Cruz Attorney Anthony Condotti told Lookout the judge agreed with the city's argument that the university's environmental analysis of its enrollment growth was insufficient.

Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Timothy Schmal sided with the city of Santa Cruz Monday in a suit filed against UC Santa Cruz over the impact increased student enrollment would have on housing affordability and other community issues. Schmal ruled that an environmental analysis UCSC submitted with its [Long Range Development Plan](#) was “deficient.”

City Attorney Anthony Condotti said a hearing on the case is scheduled for Thursday. Condotti expects the judge will lay out next steps, including likely calling on the UC Board of Regents to rescind its approval of the environmental analysis, known as an environmental impact report, or EIR, and the Long Range Development Plan.

“It’s certainly gratifying that the court recognized our concerns with regard to the adequacy of the EIR,” he told Lookout Monday.

In February 2022, the City of Santa Cruz filed a lawsuit against UCSC over the university’s plan to increase enrollment by an additional 8,500 students by 2040. The plan, called the Long Range Development Plan, or LRDP, and its environmental impact report were [approved by the Board of Regents in 2021](#). After the approvals, the [city, county and a local group](#) filed lawsuits – since consolidated into one lawsuit – over potential worsening impacts on the region’s housing market.

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The advertisement features a photograph of a diverse group of volunteers in a kitchen setting, preparing food. They are wearing hairnets and aprons. In the foreground, there are bowls of fresh produce including bananas, apples, and oranges. To the right of the photo, the text reads: 'PROMOTED CONTENT' followed by a star icon and the headline 'Community action: 10 volunteer opportunities to support Santa Cruz County's housing crisis this August'. Below the headline, it says: 'This month, the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County has put together a list of 10 ways you can take action to support housing equity and offer direct support to people affected by homelessness.' At the bottom, there is a teal button that says 'CLICK TO READ' and the Volunteer Center logo with the tagline 'Be the difference'.

They argued that UCSC’s plans don’t sufficiently analyze and

consider the impact on the surrounding community if the university failed to create housing for all of its projected additional students.

“As the university has expanded its student population and faculty, it has not built the housing necessary to accommodate that, which obviously, of necessity, places additional pressure on our already very tight housing market,” said Condotti. “And additional pressure, both in terms of the ability of people to even find a place to rent, and, of course, additional pressure in terms of the rental market and the cost of renting a home in Santa Cruz. So it’s a very important issue for the city.”

Schmal summarizes his 59-page decision in several points:

- “1. The EIR’s analysis of housing impacts is inadequate, because of the unsupported assumption that the goal of housing 100% of the new students on campus will be achieved, and the EIR’s further reliance on this unidentified mitigation measure for its significance determination as to the impact of increased student population on the demand for regional housing;**
- 2. The analysis of the 2021 LRDP’s wildfire impacts with respect to evacuation is inadequate, because it only considers the temporary impact of construction activities, and relies on a successful campus evacuation during the pandemic when the campus population was greatly reduced;**
- 3. The analysis of the LRDP’s consistency with regional land use policies is inadequate, because it relies on the unsupported ‘belief’ that LAFCO approval is unnecessary for the City to supply extra territorial water to areas of new growth under the LRDP;**

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4. The EIR’s mitigation measure for the LRDP’s impacts to wildfire with respect to evacuation routes is ineffective;

5. The EIR failed to adequately respond to the City’s proposed mitigation measure for the significant impacts to the City’s tight housing market, by an ongoing contribution from the University to the City’s AFHTF; and failed to demonstrate that this proposed mitigation measure is facially infeasible.”

Condotti thinks it’s likely that the Board of Regents will appeal the decision.

UCSC spokesperson Scott Hernandez-Jason didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.



After three years of reporting on public safety in Iowa, Hillary joins Lookout Santa Cruz with a curious eye toward the county’s education beat. At the Iowa City Press-Citizen, she focused on how local... [More by Hillary Ojeda](#)