



February 18, 2025

Via Email

The Honorable Brandy Amidon, Mayor
Members of Travelers Rest City Council
City of Travelers Rest
125 Trailblazer Road
Travelers Rest, SC 29690

Re: Proposed Altamont Inn on Paris Mountain

Dear Mayor Amidon and Members of Council:

The Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of itself, Save Our Saluda, and the Upstate Chapter of the South Carolina Native Plant Society, writes to express our concerns with and opposition to the annexation of property on Paris Mountain into the City of Travelers Rest.

Paris Mountain is a beloved natural space in Greenville County. In promotional materials for the City of Travelers Rest, as well as for Greenville County, Paris Mountain is often used to highlight the beautiful and unique natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities available in our backyard. Recognizing the importance of Paris Mountain to the community, Greenville County created one of its most protective environmental provisions by zoning property in this area “Environmentally Sensitive District – Paris Mountain.” This zoning has helped to ensure that Paris Mountain remains a protected natural area, available to old and new residents and visitors, amidst the significant development happening elsewhere in the County. Unfortunately, these protections are now at risk.

A developer recently released plans to build a 150,000-square-foot hotel complex on Paris Mountain, called the Altamont Inn. Because the County’s protective zoning prohibits construction of hotels on Paris Mountain, the developer intends to ask the City of Travelers Rest to annex its Paris Mountain property into the City and then rezone it as a means of avoiding environmental protections for the Mountain. Apparently to pursue this elimination of environmental protections, the developer has purchased two parcels. One parcel (referred to as the Flag Lot) is across Old Buncombe Road from Furman University, which was annexed by the City of Travelers Rest some years ago, while the second parcel (the Altamont Road lot) is not adjacent to any part of the City but is next to the Flag Lot; this remote lot is the property intended

for the hotel. The developer's sole reason for purchasing the Flag Lot was likely an attempt to try to provide the necessary legal "link" to justify annexation. *See* S. C. Code §§ 5-3-300, 5-3-305 (municipalities may only annex property that is contiguous with existing municipality property). Once the Flag Lot is annexed into the City of Travelers Rest, the developer then contemplates that the Altamont Road lot can be annexed as well, thus paving the way for the hotel. This proposed annexation is unacceptable for multiple reasons.

First, the hotel will be extremely harmful to Paris Mountain. The environmentally sensitive zoning for the area is not only to preserve the Mountain, but also to ensure that any development on the Mountain (largely residential) is consistent with the sensitive ecosystems, including headwater streams for the Reedy River and native wildlife and plants, and can be safely constructed on the steep mountain slopes. It also ensures that traffic-inducing commercial developments cannot be built on the Mountain, in turn protecting residents, visitors, and the cyclists of Travelers Rest and surrounding communities who frequent Altamont Road. Yet the proposed development would cause the very harm this zoning is meant to prevent. Construction of the hotel will pollute streams and disturb and displace wildlife and plants, and it will lead to an increase in stormwater runoff, inevitably resulting in downstream channel erosion, sedimentation, and flooding of downstream properties. Operation of the hotel will create daily pollution on the steep slopes, and a 150,000-square foot hotel complex will increase traffic in the area.

Second, if Travelers Rest approves this annexation request, the City's reputation will no longer be that of a charming mountain town committed to preserving natural spaces. It will be the City that worked with a developer to erase environmental protections and opened up Paris Mountain to commercial development, degrading the community's treasured natural resource and scarring forever the viewshed from Poinsett Highway. Although the proposed hotel alone, is unacceptable, that is not the only harm that would follow the proposed annexation. If the Flag Lot and then the Altamont Road lot were annexed, all adjacent lots on Paris Mountain will become vulnerable to annexation for development, and all lots adjacent to them, and the County's environmental protections for the Mountain will be significantly weakened or eliminated.

Last, the developer's reassurances should not persuade the City to approve its requested annexation. The developer claims that the hotel will "enhance" Paris Mountain, but a treasured natural resource is not "enhanced" by destroying its ecology and viewshed. The developer claims that the project will "preserve nature" because it intends to conserve 20 acres of land that could be used for residential development. But this preservation from residential development surely does not outweigh the natural resources that will be lost by constructing a hotel complex and significantly weakening one of the County's most important environmental protections. Further, the property proposed for preservation is very steep, can be accessed only by a narrow corridor from Old Buncombe Road, has deep ravines, and contains several waterways—all making it an unlikely site for multi-family residential development and a severe challenge to permit, as well as the source of another heated controversy if such a concept were ever seriously pursued. The developer claims that the hotel complex will have "no impact on local traffic." It simply defies logic to suggest that constructing a 150,000-square-foot, 150 room hotel, with a "750-person banquet hall, and expansive event lawn for weddings and other events" will have no impact on

traffic.¹ Nor is the developer's inflammatory claim that Paris Mountain is "restricted to [] groups of wealthy individuals" remotely accurate.² As noted above, Altamont Road welcomes cyclists from all over Greenville (something this hotel complex would jeopardize) and Paris Mountain State Park is a natural haven open to the public for hiking, boating, swimming, cycling, birding, and picnicking. Far from restricted, Paris Mountain is one of Greenville's most important and treasured public natural spaces. The developer is simply wrong on each of these points. The developer's attempts to justify this project only underscore how little it understands about Paris Mountain's importance and the importance of preserving the natural spaces that make Travelers Rest a unique and popular destination and hometown.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the City of Travelers Rest to reject any annexation request by the Altamont Inn developers.

Sincerely,

/s/Emily Wyche
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CC:

Melanie Ruhlman, Save Our Saluda
Rick Huffman, South Carolina Native Plant Society

¹ Each of the developer's claims noted in this paragraph can be found on their website at <https://divinegroup.us/the-inn-at-altamont/>.

² Spencer Donovan, *A developer wants to build a luxury hotel on Paris Mountain. More than 10,000 are protesting* (Feb. 13, 2025), https://www.postandcourier.com/greenville/news/paris-mountain-hotel-greenville-sc-altamont-inn-travelers-rest/article_0e3185ea-e7fe-11ef-95ad-13a04b6d4043.html.