

June 9, 2026

Re: Planning Commission Agenda Item 6a - June 11, 2026

Major Use Permit PL-26-115, Seigler Springs Holdings, LLC (APN: 115-007-03 & 06)

To the Lake County Planning Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Major Use Permit PL-26-115, Seigler Springs Holdings, LLC (APN: 115-007-03 & 06).

This comment letter is in form a follow up of the last comment letter I submitted regarding Clearpath Canyon, LLC (UP 23-10; IS 23-21) in April 2026, as this property and project was previously also owned by Brian Pensack. The current applicant, Forest Elie, took on this project after Brian could no longer pursue both projects simultaneously.

I simply want to note for your consideration that I also visited this site with the applicant to assess its current state and provide my professional recommendation, and as usual, the site visit provided an entirely new perspective on the pending project that the application documents on their own could not provide.

Upon accessing the site with Forest, we took the route from Middletown which brought us through the section of North Seigler Springs Road that went directly through the heart of the Adidam Religious Community.

It was early afternoon on a Saturday, and the community members were gathering on the north side of the road, as we slowed down to make the 90 degree turn on North Seigler Springs Road near what appeared to be the official entrance to the community. It became readily apparent that our presence and commute through this section of the road was potentially disturbing, and I did feel a little intrusive despite the fact that we were only driving through a public county road. I quickly concluded that this is most likely a big part of their concerns about the proposed project - the added traffic and noise along this otherwise quiet stretch of road.

As we went further north and turned into the access road, where we made the slow uphill approach to the proposed cultivation site, and I also couldn't help but notice how this site had previously been burned at one point, and had also been left to grow wild without any maintenance regarding wildfire hazards and maintaining hazardous vegetation along the access road in the lower parts of the property. My initial reaction was that this had become a neglected property and now posed a significant wildfire hazard.

Upon arrival at the proposed cultivation site atop the minor ridge on the property I was also presented with a scene I did not expect. Based on memories of the original application and aerial views of the location, I was expecting a site with dense forest and a need for significant tree removal. As it turned out, the location was surprisingly open and mostly covered with brush, with larger pines, a timber harvest species, appearing to be the predominant species of trees to be removed, among a handful of other native tree species that were smaller and not as well established as the pines. It was also interesting to realize the site was situated upon a bench and was out of site from any neighboring property due to topography and existing vegetation.

With these two aspects of the project as my first impression of the site, I recommended proposing a Condition of Approval that would limit commercial access to the property to the northern section of North Seigler Springs Road to prevent traffic and noise from disturbing the Adidam Religious Community. I've seen similar Conditions of Approval successfully applied to winery projects in Napa County, where community members on country roads did not want the traffic generated by winery visitation to disturb their peace and solitude. I also recommended highlighting the fact that use permit approval would trigger the requirement, and the resources required to maintain the hazardous vegetation that currently exists on the property.

Regarding the removal of timber tree species and protected oaks, Mitigation Measures have been applied that require the replanting of oaks at the specified ratio, and I must say, I've never seen an applicant as excited about this requirement as Forest Elie. After walking through the brush of the proposed cultivation site, he had me trek to the other side of the ridge to show me an area he picked out for oak tree replacement, and went on and on about how exciting it would be to manage an irrigated oak tree replacement site. I honestly felt like he was more excited about cultivating oak trees than the cannabis he was proposing.

Which leads me to the most important aspect of this recommendation, which is for the applicant, Forest Elie, himself. During my first eight months in the position as Cannabis Program Manager, I consistently took four to eight phone calls a day from either applicants who were irate and yelling about the delays occurring in the processing of their cannabis cultivation permits, or calls from irate neighboring property owners who were deeply offended that the county would accept or even consider an application for cannabis cultivation within proximity to their property. It was a marathon of patience, empathy, and explanation, and despite the brutal effort to explain regulations, laws, and procedures, I was consistently beaten up verbally from all sides. I did my best to take it in stride and shield the remaining department staff from the mental abuse, as staff turnover had become a real problem and we needed to hold on to the remaining planning staff still in place.

In the midst of this, while many of the people verbally assaulting me on a regular basis were upset over minor issues or things out of our control, Forest had a legitimate reason to be quite upset, as staff had mismanaged his application and records, and due to this he suffered a significant financial loss. Forest actually had every right to be upset about the handling of his first use permit application and issuance of an Early Activation Permit. Despite this, he was impressively patient, kind, and understanding, and continued to work with staff, and eventually obtained approval from the Planning Commission.

Since then he has gone on to become a successful and responsible cultivator on another project similar to this one, and has consistently paid his cultivation taxes to the County and kept his license with the state in good standing. He is exactly the kind of permittee and cultivator that this County needs and had in mind when it approved cannabis cultivation, and he has also branched out in a successful real estate career in the area, realizing that cannabis may or may not always pay the bills.

I could go on and on about Forest's dedication to land preservation, the 20-acre no development area he's proposing, the hidden gem in our ordinance that limits outdoor cultivation to a 20-1 acre ratio (which so many don't realize indirectly preserves 95 percent of parcel land from development with each outdoor cannabis project - a dream for a land conservationist like myself), but I'd rather just end this by saying Forest has become more than just a professional acquaintance. He's a friend that I respect, who respects and works well with those around him, is a good neighbor, and I do hope you choose to approve his project.

Sincerely,

Andrew Amelung
Lake County Resident
California