

May 8, 2019

Cleve Morris, City Manager
City of Placerville
Placerville, California, 95667

Dear Mr. Morris/ Committee for repurposing the Confidence/ Emigrant Jane Building:

My name is James Philip Marquez and I am of Oglala Lakota and White Mountain Apache heritage. I am also the Executive Director of the Foothill Indian Education Alliance, Inc.(FIEA). We are a Native owned and operated non-profit for the past 22 years. Our programs provide free academic, social and cultural services to Native students and families in our service area. We administer the American Indian Education Center Program, the El Dorado/ Amador Counties Indian Education Project and the Wennem Wadati "Good Medicine" Project.

I have been a resident of and employed in El Dorado County for 27 years. My first and only employment in the county has been in the position I currently hold. In this position I have come to know and faithfully serve the Native communities of El Dorado and Amador Counties. I have also built many strong and lasting friendships among the local Natives. In my work, I came to realize early on that there is not just one Native people in the area. There are many Natives from tribes around the state and the country. There are also many from different bands of Miwok up and down the Western Slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. It became apparent to me early on that these many groups of Miwok Indians were often related by blood or marriage, but did not always get along with each other. Which brings me to the point of this letter.

First I would like to say that it has always been my policy and the policy of my organization that we remain neutral in all political matters relating to local Native peoples. Over the years there have been small Miwok groups that have claimed to be the real Miwoks. None of these people are federally recognized and most not state recognized either. There is currently a group in El Dorado County that is now making that claim. They call themselves the El Dorado County Wopumnes Nisenan-Miwuk Nation. It is my understanding that there are 12 members of that group. This group has been making the claim of being the real Miwoks for some time now. They have tried to challenge the Shingle Spring Rancheria's sovereignty. The courts have upheld the tribal sovereignty of the Shingle Springs Rancheria and directed the leader of this group to cease and desist his claim to being the real Shingle Springs Rancheria.

The Wopumnes Nisenan-Miwuk has changed over time, loosing members and adding new ones, but they continue their claim to be the real Miwoks of El Dorado County. Under most circumstances this would not be a problem as the Native community knows what is and is not real, but it has come to my attention recently that this group has now written a proposal for the reuse of a building in downtown Placerville and has proposed to restore the building and build a Miwok museum and visitor's center. I know they have no money and the possibility of them securing grant funding is very slim as they have no experience running programs, provided services, or exhibited any expertise in any of these areas.

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My main concern with their proposal is, if they are granted access to this building, they would now have a platform to preach to the non-Native community their mantra about being the real Miwoks. Having a space downtown would help to legitimize their claims whether there is any truth to them or not. I was also told they proposed to bring school group to their museum. That would be a disaster. What they are trying to get people to believe is not the truth. In conversations with other Miwok people in the area about this, they know of this group, but have no idea of their plans to start a museum. This could really create an uproar in the local Miwok community. There will be many Miwok who would oppose this move. I'm sure there would have been local Miwok people at the meeting where this group made their proposal to the city if they had proper notification.

I am very concerned that the City of Placerville and the Downtown Association has been deceived. I am guessing that this group has not been vetted at all. Before any decisions on their proposal have been made, some research needs to be done and other local Miwok people need to be consulted. This would give you a more accurate picture of the impact this group will have on the entire Miwok community. I would hate to see this issue blow up in the face of the City of Placerville and the Downtown Association.

It should also be known that this group has been setting up at Coloma Gold Discovery Park for Coloma Days. It has been observed by others that their presence is not at all reflective of Miwok culture. Members of their group became docents at the park. The Park reprimanded some for pushing "Real Miwok" during their docent duties. Barry Smith, superintendant of the park, has had difficulties with the group. With his position, it would not be appropriate for him to write a letter, but he has said he would be willing to speak with you personally about this issue. His phone number is 916-257-0919.

I have always been a big fan of our Downtown. I recently moved to the historic area just across the freeway from downtown to have better access for my family and friends. I have known some of the merchants for many years. It is my hope that you will strongly reconsider your support for the proposal of the El Dorado County Wopumnes Nisenan-Miwuk Nation. It seems to me the prudent thing to do might be to postpone a decision until some vetting could be done and a meeting can be organized with the local Native community. I would be willing to help with that. This would only take a few weeks. This doesn't seem like a big imposition for a building that has been vacant for years.

I have written this letter as a private citizen with many years of experience in the local Native community. I am not speaking for my FIEA Board of Directors or our program. I would like to reiterate that my opposition to the proposal of the Wopumnes Nisenan-Miwuk is not a personal one, but for the good of the entire Miwok community. I can be reached by cell at 530-644-1679 if you would like to speak with me. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,


James Philip Marquez