

Marin Conservation League
North Marin Unit
Meeting Notes

February 21, 2013

The meeting was called to order at the U'Ren home. Present were: Dorothy Thomas, Don Wilhelm, Gail Wilhelm, Pat U'Ren, Frank U'Ren, Eleanor Sluis, Jay Framson, Joyce Applen, Pam Drew and Susan Stompe, and guest Peter Tiernan, Novato Planning Commissioner

Announcements included: Walk at Olompali on March 23 and Clean & Green Day, April 20.

The notes of the January 10th meeting were approved as distributed.

Novato General Plan update: Peter Tiernan reviewed the history of the revision which began 3 or 4 years ago with a General Plan Steering Committee. That group was working on the North Redwood Corridor when the Housing Element side tracked the whole process. The City Manager appointed a “Working Group” to provide some consensus on the Housing Element, but the process exploded when the City Council adopted a plan that was different from the one recommended by the “working group”. The City is working with state HCD to come up with a certifiable plan. The GP Steering Committee has been dissolved and the Planning Commission is to assume the responsibility.

Peter said that PC issues coming up include an April hearing on the Housing Element and a senior housing project where the batch plant was located south of Vintage Oaks and the Hanna Ranch. It is a very isolated site. There was discussion about appropriate densities for Novato neighborhoods where affordable housing is proposed. 20 units per acre (u/ac) was acceptable to most people, but 30 u/ac was required by HCD. Peter said the briefing of the PC said that state allows 20 u/ac for family housing, but 30 u/ac for senior housing. A comment was made that if seniors had more options, they would move out of their family size housing which would free up a lot of housing for young families.

North Redwood Blvd. was discussed as the focus of much city attention. A survey of residents and merchants was recently circulated about what retail development the community would prefer. There is interest on the part of the Chamber of Commerce to create a commercial center on North Redwood Blvd. Gail reviewed the plan that the former Steering Committee was recommending. It allowed for two types of vertical mixed use with housing. Peter said a new “Urban mixed use” designation could require that the housing be occupied before the retail or office. Gail pointed out that an ABAG study shows that the Bay Area has adequate high income housing and low income housing, but not keeping up with the demand for middle income housing.

Peter pointed out that the city policy on requiring only retail uses at street level on Grant Avenue is not realistic with the changes in retail and high frequency of online shopping. Everyone agreed that the nature of retail has changed. Fourth Street in Berkeley was cited as good model for Novato. Pam was very familiar with the development of that area and said it took many years from the vision to the reality. The transition was very difficult. The outcome is very successful, altho there were tough times during the economic downturn. Everyone agreed that human scale development, with outside spaces and good landscaping are important attributes for new commercial. Parking is important.

The Square Shopping Center was cited as a disgrace to the community, since the “anchor” has been empty so many years. Pam said she has talked to the owner and there have been a couple neighborhood meetings, but no business has offered to move in. The neighborhood would prefer grocery and produce. Part of the site has been contaminated by a previous dry cleaner. Gail asked if housing would be acceptable. Pam said the

neighborhood would accept some, but privacy is an issue. If the housing was in the part next to Novato Blvd. and did not exceed 20 u/ac, it might be acceptable.

Projects and Issues around Novato:

Housing proposals: Homeward Bound is looking at the Henry Olhoff site on Nave Dr. for possible family bungalows. Pam said that Larkspur has done an extensive Station Area Plan. Novato has not applied for Station Area Planning funding, so that kind of a plan will not be done for either Novato SMART station.

Millworks survey: Susan and Gail have an appointment with the owner of Dr. Insomnias as a possible incentive for the survey.

Port Sonoma/Carneros Ranch: No date has been raised for the completion of the EIR.

Canyon Village: Ellie reported that grading is going on and more trees have been removed.

Other: Susan showed that the new Community Marin document has just been printed. It on the MCL website: marinconservationleague.org

The meeting adjourned at 9:35

The next meeting will be March 28 at Stompes.

Notes by SS