

Marin County Community Development Agency
Planning Division: Public Scoping Session
2012 Draft Marin County Housing Element
Supplement To The 2007 Countywide Plan Environmental Impact Report

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In regard to the environmental effects of developing the proposed "Affordable Housing Opportunity Sites" listed in the 2012 Draft Marin County Housing Element Supplement to the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan Environmental Impact Report, the Sustainable TamAlmonte Executive Committee has the following concerns, comments and recommendations. These have relevance to land use changes, development standards, and zoning in highly constrained semi-rural Tamalpais Planning Area indicated for potential sites.

In 1992 an EIR on the Tamalpais Community Area Plan identified multiple significant impacts of future growth based on geology, plant and animal life, air quality, land use and population, vehicle movement, parking and traffic hazards, public services, utilities, aesthetics and recreation, and flood control.

The realities that existed then have been exacerbated since then, further limiting mitigation potential. Any significant increase in housing as proposed would not be appropriate, potentially placing vulnerable people in vulnerable places.

Summary of scoping concerns :

The environmental constraints include flooding, liquefaction and subsidence, historic marshland and bay mud, creeks and bay shoreline (Stream Conservation Area and Baylands Corridor), predicted sea level rise inundation, sensitive and endangered species, high seismic hazard and fire risk. Serious mitigation would involve preservation of open space, protection of wildlife habitat and creation of a buffer zone for wildlife upland retreat to respond to current flooding and future sea inundation; such community priority has been requested yet ignored for at least 35 years ! Additional impacts from constraints such as traffic, schools, retail, water and health and compatibility with semi-rural environment are referenced for scoping below.

100 Year Floodplain, Flooding and Sea Level Rise :

Flooding continues to occur with the tides even in August with no rain. The parcels proposed for development or redevelopment whether they be in the Tam Junction Shopping Center west of Shoreline Highway or parcels east of Shoreline Highway or other low lying areas of Tamalpais Valley are predicted to be under water within 100 years or sooner due to global climate change. Sea level rise is expected to come soon and higher than previously known at the review of the CWP EIR. Were development allowed on the land adjacent to Bothin Marsh (which was once part of this marsh) any chance of restoring it to marshland would be significantly impaired creating an irreversible impact and impeding our valley's ability to adapt to sea level rise.

Placing new housing within the 100 year floodplain and those likely to be in the future floodplain should be prohibited so there will not be an increase in the number of residents and properties at risk. (Locations for housing which will not be vulnerable to these hazards should be sought.) Also Increasing housing density in flood prone areas might significantly increase the risk of flooding due to increased soil compaction and displacement.

Endangered Special Status Species :

Bothin Marsh and adjacent areas including Coyote Creek are inhabited by special status species, the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse therefore there would need to be an analysis of the potential impacts of loss of populations or essential habitat due to development and increased human impact proposed. impact from proximity to habitat of endangered species is too irreversible to override.

High Seismic Hazard and Fire Risk :

Tam Valley is considered dangerous from even moderate seismic activity and therefore development should be directed to other areas underlain with bedrock rather than bay mud. Filled land is susceptible to liquefaction and therefore hazardous to residents.

The CWP indicated area is also high fire risk.

LOS Traffic, Parking, Public Transit, Access and Egress

The 'F' level traffic is constantly growing worse, backing up on freeways and interfering with egress and access for residents. This is particularly serious in a personal emergency or general disaster. Over a million visitors a year attempt to pass through the narrow entrance to our semi-rural valley for recreation on Mount Tamalpais, Muir Woods, Muir and Stinson Beaches as well as the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Mill Valley. The public transit service does not reduce

this significant impact as it is inadequate to even serve local residents needing to get to important facilities such as the College of Marin or Marin General Hospital. Parking at bus hubs is already exceeded with commuters overflowing onto streets further discouraging use of public transit. The assumption that low income people will not drive especially in a poor service area creates a flawed analysis which underestimates the additional driving and the impacts that implementation of the Housing Element will cause. Regardless of attempted mitigation any additional traffic worsens the impacts in an already hazardous area, including the safety risks for children traveling in and out of the area to school.

Schools, Shopping (Retail), and Medical Care :

Some services are already exceeded such as the overcrowded local elementary school which cannot serve all the residents here who must therefore leave to go to school outside the area. There are a minimum of neighborhood-serving businesses; residents must leave the area to shop for basic needs such as food and clothes, medical care and education.

Water Supply :

We are conserving water, however, we must still live within the limits of our finite watershed. Mitigations that would require actions not within the authority of the County, but lie instead within the authority of other agencies, such as Caltrans or MMWD cannot be considered feasible, according to the past CWP DEIR. In relation to water supply, increased development cannot assume unlimited water availability as current supply is dependent on enforcement of 'no net water increase' by the MMWD (which affordable housing may be exempt from) and current voluntary success in water conservation. No development projects can assume available water from Desal (using the most toxic Bay in California) because it would be subject to a vote of the residents of Marin. Additional water demand also affects ground water supply. water supply quantity and quality as well as having secondary environmental impacts to "instream flow regimes and aquatic habitat which would require adequate evaluation and mitigation.

Health Risks from Proximity to Highways, Freeways and Major Roads :

There is the potential health risk from proximity to major roads and freeways which has been well documented in a multitude of major studies. The significant risks of lung impairment in children, increased cardiac risks in seniors, premature miscarriage in young mothers, and cancer cannot be made insignificant by mitigations such as minor improvements in present traffic conditions or adjustments in indoor air

standards. The area identified for development is in the crossroads, i.e. convergence, of Highway #1, Highway #101 and Shoreline Highway! It is also a major truck route to Mill Valley and for vehicles using the construction materials business on Shoreline Highway. The standard in the current Countywide Plan is inadequate in protecting future residents (sensitive receptors) from development too close to such pollutant sources, especially diesel. (EPA/CARB). Inconsistency with (i.e. excellence of) the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's ("BAAQMD") guidelines and thresholds for air pollution is considered a significant unmitigable environmental impact. Unsupportable statements that someday soon there will be less traffic and less pollutants is not an adequate analysis of what the levels of pollutants will actually be after the Housing Element is implemented and does not address the cumulative health impacts (from pollution and noise) of future residents living at sites in close proximity to freeways and major roads.

High Density Development in Semi-Rural Community :

Last, but not least, the projected high-density development on sites identified in this constrained area is incompatible with existing development and the adjacent neighborhood based on scale and appearance, FAR, height and setbacks. Urban development and overdevelopment by private developers has consistently been considered both inappropriate and unsustainable and has therefore been opposed by the community for decades. County-sponsored intense development in our semi-rural area, likewise, would have an adverse unmitigated impact on both the current and future residents as well as aggravating the human impact on the sensitive and threatened creek, marsh and Bayland Corridor environment.

Specific Sites :

The environmental considerations in the Housing Element already reference traffic impacts on Hwy. #1 for sites #4 Old Chevron Station and #14 Armstrong Nursery. They fail to reference the impact of the freeway on the health of future residents (sensitive receptors) and particularly the issue of environmental injustice of accelerated density allowed beyond the low end of density (differentially) for low income residents.

Additionally the Armstrong Nursery site is in the Stream Conservation Area and the Manzanita sites may be included in the Baylands Corridor.

Conclusion :

Therefore any current policies or supplement changes which propel development in spite of known adverse conditions should be identified and rejected and more sustainable alternative urban locations sought to provide such land use. It is also

essential that thorough, in-depth analysis of any development proposal be assured by maintaining full CEQA evaluation which is the primary tool to ensure communities have adequate information about the environmental and community impacts of construction projects, especially when they are growth-inducing with potential cumulative impacts.