

Marin Conservation League
North Marin Unit
Special Meeting
Friday, Nov. 11, 2011

The special meeting took place at the home of Susan Stompe at 10 a.m. Present were: Bernie Meyers (departed at 11:20), Pat U'Ren, Frank U'Ren, Edith Piltch, Rick Fraites, Gail Wilhelm and Susan Stompe.

The purpose of the meetings was to evaluate the merits of the Hanna Ranch development proposal for recommendation to the MCL Board.

The project is to build a 116 room hotel, 2 restaurants, a mixed commercial/office building and a retail building on a 19.7 acre site just south of Vintage Oaks in Novato. The total square footage is 135,900 sq. ft. The land use is proposed to be changed from BPO (business professional office) to CG (general commercial). Although the FAR is stated at 16.7 that is based on the gross area of the site and does not deduct the steep slopes, onsite wetlands or wetland setbacks. The allowable FAR is .4.

The first issue addressed was which alignment should be recommended for the bicycle and pedestrian path. Path A was dismissed because of the amount of grading that would be necessary, with attendant tree loss. Path B was dismissed because of its impact on the small pond at the base of the hill. That alignment would be along the railroad tracks from the southerly property line, cut along the south side of the small pond and link with a proposed path along Rowland Blvd. The significant grading immediately adjacent to the pond would require retaining walls that exceed the city's allowable height. **M/S/C (GW/RF) that MCL recommend the bike path along the main access road, from Rowland Blvd. to the emergency access on the south side of the property.** Bernie abstained, needing more information.

The project proposes an exception to the Novato Development Standards for street width. It is to have a 25 foot private street as the main access to the property. The size of the street seems to be limited because of the relatively narrow "panhandle" at the north end of the property where the mixed use commercial buildings are proposed between the Beverly Ehreth Ecological Pond and the railroad tracks. The Environmentally Superior Alternative in the EIR is the Reduced Project Alternative which deletes one of the buildings on the panhandle and sets all development outside the 50 ft. buffer, but the rest of the project remains the same. **If MCL recommends the Reduced Project Alternative, the constraint on the road width would be reduced and the bicycle access could be along a standard 44 foot road.**

The project proposes encroachments within the property of the Marin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District. These encroachments, decks and an amphitheater should be eliminated. There is also a disagreement between the developer and the MCFC&WCD that the "top of bank" at the Bev Ehreth pond is the water line. **The North Marin Unit supports the Flood Control District definition of the top of bank where the slope from the water line levels to horizontal.** If that definition is used the buildings proposed in the panhandle would not meet the required city setback of 50 ft. from top of bank.

MCL and Audubon requested the EIR identify a wildlife corridor between the Bev Ehreth Pond, the small pond and the wetlands east of the railroad tracks. The proposal in the FEIR was to put

a 2.5 ft. high culvert with air grates under the road between the two ponds. The Flood Control District recommended daylighting the existing culvert rather than adding a second culvert, and planting riparian vegetation for a natural linkage/wildlife corridor between the two ponds. This solution could also be mitigation for the small seasonal wetlands to be destroyed by the project. The North Marin Unit **M/S/C (RF/EP) recommends that MCL support the Flood Control solution. This would necessitate a road bridge and pedestrian/bike bridge, but could be a natural amenity to the project.** Bernie left the meeting at this point.

The hotel tower should not exceed height limits for Novato or Novato's ridge line limits.

There has been community discussion about requiring housing on the site. The NMU considered it and decided that the isolation from other neighborhoods and noise impacts on the site made it incompatible for housing, but recommends the city implement a housing linkage fee to commercial and office development projects. The City of Novato contributed to a study done by the county to develop such an ordinance, but has not adopted it. The County and the City of San Rafael have adopted ordinances. **M/S/C (GW/EP) that MCL apply for a grant from MCF to coordinate the adoption of a Novato ordinance that would require a linkage fee for commercial developments to contribute to affordable housing in the community.** Novato should include a condition of approval to the Hanna Ranch project that any in lieu commercial linkage fees adopted by Novato prior to occupancy, should be paid at that time.

The meeting adjourned at 12 noon. The next meeting will be the Holiday Potluck on Dec. 14.