

Sunday, February 8, 2009

Dear Planning Commissioners,

Well done and thank you for the Town Hall forum offered last Thursday evening. I found it a dynamic and truly democratic approach to sharing information and opinion on how to proceed with planning, specifically for housing, in Humboldt County.

Due to time and many raised hands, I was unable to share one set of questions and an idea during the section on Emergency Shelter, Transitional and Supportive Housing. Most of the discussion at the meeting was geared towards housing for the current (and growing) homeless population. Does Senate Bill 2 take into consideration the home/houseless population that grows (and remains) in the wake of disaster? Perhaps it is more in the scope of the Office of Emergency Services to identify and proactively develop locations such as Redwood Acres to house and provide for this population, but could locations such as these be further established to provide for the variety of all needs— “emergency shelter” as you and SB 2 define it, including transitional and supportive? This kind of housing seems more and more advisable in face of our current economic crisis, as more people find themselves destitute, and in light of such situations as the crises following disasters such as Katrina, which will only continue to prevail as global warming proceeds. Would this county not prefer to focus resources on shelter of this kind that is well-built up, rather than allow the shanty towns that desperately follow a void of proactive planning? Thank you for the work you are doing on behalf of this need.

As this may be the one letter I write to you, my representatives, please allow me also to share my hopes and opinion in general about how planning should proceed in Humboldt County.

This region is precious to the world. We harbor a World Heritage Site as designated by UNESCO: our magnificent Ancient Coast Redwood forest. What Europe and Southern California (two radically different examples) paved over to accommodate and share with the world in the form of two internationally known cultures, we still possess in natural wilderness beauty. There is so little left of these deeply spiritual and biodiverse places on this planet! And if utilitarian pursuits matter more, our local open land and watersheds are essential in providing a wide variety of economic and agricultural staples both at home and abroad.

Any planning made in Humboldt County must faithfully remain true to our local finest treasures. And yet, growing populations must be accommodated, and this in times of Peak Oil and funding paucity.

Unsurprisingly, I strongly support Alternative A of the Humboldt County General Plan, in which, according to the County Health Department’s recent Impact Assessment, “health would be improved most by accommodating future population in areas where residents can most easily access jobs, goods, services, social and cultural events by forms of transportation other than cars...” This statement holds especially true with respect for

the rising tide of Boomers/seniors coming of age who will need such local and accessible services and affordable housing.

But whether Alternative A or B reigns, ALL development must remain true to the following: All development needs to be planned with an eye towards reducing greenhouse gases, by law (AB 32- as litigation is already occurring in other parts of the state), and by bottom line ethics, in efforts for future generations, in full knowledge that we are ending the petroleum age (business as usual), as we rethink how we transport ourselves and our goods. I read recently that rail transport uses 1/7th the amount of energy of that used by vehicles. To repeat a phrase used at the Town Hall: "There are so many good ideas out there!" Let's use them instead of falling back on the dominant paradigm! Sprawl (famously called "the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of mankind") and McMansion style building, including those who would support that kind of privileged and outdated development, must no longer be indulged. Please stand up to the local, strong voices that support this kind of myopic and wasteful planning. Let us set an example for the rest of the state and the nation in demanding Smart Development, rebuilding existing and aging infrastructure, with new and affordable housing in these reclaimed areas, near public transit and cultural necessities, and in balance with nature.

As the Planning & Conservation League has stated, "Global warming is the challenge of our generation. Meeting this challenge requires fundamental changes in the way we grow our communities." Another more urgent twist on that warning came from solar energy scientist Aden Meinel, as far back as 1971, regarding how we'll "need to spend a fair fraction of our fossil fuel endowment putting into place a renewable energy system." [Ecocities—Rebuilding Cities in Balance with Nature, Richard Register.]

Wise planning and development, as defined by Alternative A, is the rigorous and critically necessary path I endorse.

I want to thank each of you for your efforts, past, current and future, to support the rebuilding of our communities with more long-term sustainable alternatives, "in balance with nature" --the amazing local treasures we are privileged to steward.

Sincerely,

Stacy Becker
2364 Hewitt Road
McKinleyville, CA
(707) 839-1352