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February 12, 2008

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Humboldt County Planning Commission
Community Development Services Dept.
3015 H Street
Eureka, California 95501

Re: Community Design Element

Dear Commissioners:

The Humboldt Association of Realtors® is submitting this letter as comment on the Community Design Element of the General Plan.

We interpret this Element as based on "Smart Growth" or "New Urbanist" principles such as found in the McKinleyville Community Plan. There are several examples where specific McKinleyville Plan policies are proposed. "Smart Growth" tends to be "one-size-fits-all" formula design. We are a rural county and believe "Smart Growth" does not fit us here. We suggest it is not appropriate, therefore, to apply the McKinleyville Plan policies to the entire County. We also point out that most of the McKinleyville Plan has never been implemented, further reason to stop any further consideration of this Element in the General Plan.

"Smart Growth", as enacted through "form-based" planning codes, does not always work. Staff language in the Element itself seems to support this. "Smart Growth" proves

[p]roblematic...in older communities which grew up during or before zoning. Historic neighborhoods in the County often feature the very design characteristics not well supported by the County's zoning model: a rich mix of land uses, building types, and housing prices; higher densities and mixed densities; narrow streets with trees close to the road; shallow setbacks; and low parking ratios....

This "form-based" code is the latest iteration of "New Urbanist" influenced planning regulation. It is a land development regulatory tool that places primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment with the end

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goal of producing a specific type of "place." However well intended, it does tend to create a Disneyland effect.

Each town deserves a regulating document which allows for unique, original development rather than repeating duplication. This argues against using an architectural pattern book or one-size-fits-all formula such as promoted by "form-based" codes. There is no "right fit" design book for every town. Clearly our current zoning has been too focused on single use districts which constricts the overall achievement of a "sense of place." However, the "form-based" approach is not an ideal fit. No code, no matter how innovative, can promise the instant vision of some "New Urbanist" development.

"Form-based" code is described as giving less consideration to land use. However, use *does* matter because the *market* for housing and retail necessary to realize the vision inherent in "form-based" zoning is driven by use, not by building form and placement.

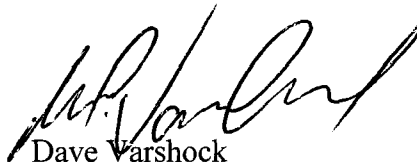
We believe this Community Design Element is ill conceived and inappropriate for rural areas such as Humboldt County and advocate that it be removed from the General Plan update. For this reason a voting chart has not been included with this letter.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to continued participation in the General Plan update.

Sincerely,



Tom Hiller
President



Dave Varshock
Government Relations Chair

cc: H. C. Board of Supervisors
Kirk Girard, Community Services Development Director