

To: Marin County Planning Commissioners
Re: the DEIR and the CWP

March 10, 2007

The current weight of evidence points to the necessity to develop a plan that suits today's conditions and tomorrow's assaults. There is no economic need for a significant increase in commercial development at the Junction which currently meets our everyday shopping needs, as does shopping centers in Corte Madera, Strawberry, Mill Valley (Downtown, Miller Ave. and Blithedale) and Marin City within 5 minutes of Tam Valley. Additionally, local shopping in our semi-rural community was intended to preclude drawing regional shopping traffic. We maintain that additional housing in this area will strain local resources and exacerbate traffic and parking problems. We submit that several key base documents in the new Plan are contradicted by the expressed goals of the Countywide General Plan as applied in the Tam Planning Area.

1. Map 2-11 Liquefaction Susceptibility Hazards are not correct. According to data from the Walgreen development at the Junction area and according to records from the proposed Tam Gateway Redevelopment Project in the 1970's, bay mud ranges from 50 to 80 feet deep in the area of Bell Market (now Delano's), Walgreens and nearby parcels. So available records contradict the Knudson, et al map, which indicates no hazards of liquefaction based on soil's composition. The map focuses on current water marsh areas as having the highest risk, yet the 1989 liquefaction in the San Francisco Marina occurred under homes built on long buried bay mud.
2. Map 2-9 Seismic Shaking regarding location of soil type D and possible E is not properly identified in the Tam Valley floor. The entire valley floor is known to consist of bay mud with fill over it. Richardson Bay extended as far as Poplar Street in the 19th century and as late as the 1950's was marshland throughout the valley before it was filled and developed with current housing. Tam Valley and the Junction area lie in as close proximity to major earthquake faults as does the Marina area of San Francisco or elsewhere in the Bay Area. That flat land area is vulnerable to seismic shaking so your source is contradicted by known historical documents.
3. Map 2-12 Flooding shows areas of expected 100 year floods. We drive through flooded streets every year and Tam Valley is in a flood zone, suffers frequent floods and insurance companies demand flood coverage. The Flood Control District has installed four pump stations to help but flooding still occurs. The plan ignores the fact that the area is a flood plain.
4. The Bayfront Conservation Zone should include that part of Coyote Creek that runs from the end of the Martin Triangle at Richardson Bay to the bridge at Flamingo street. This waterway rises and falls with the tidal action, is utilized by herons, egrets, clapper rails, and ducks and is in close proximity to a now empty parcel that is situated behind Video Droid in the shopping area. You should use

the Cowardin definition (the national standard) of wetlands which would protect this valuable wetland ; the Corps definition for wetland might also apply here. By not extending the BCZ in this sensitive natural habitat you avoid implementing your own stated desire to protect such natural features.

5. Your stated goal to support a sustainable Marin County is undermined by the HOD proposed for the Tam Planning Area. Traffic is already at “F” and water supply is maxed out. Current sewage service to the housing units in Tam Valley flats known as Kay Park are having to be redone (cost \$700,000 for first phase) because of sinking bay mud referred to in point 2 above.
6. The attempt to supply “workforce housing” for people who can’t afford the market rents is laudable in intent but totally inadequate. The Plan indicates that there are tens of thousands of workers (48,000) driving in to work here because they can not afford the rents and house prices, but a token hundred or so would not put a dent in that reality. The HOD would use a few “feel good” token low income units to ramp up development of more unsustainable market rate units. We cannot avoid the fact that more population in this restricted and risky area will have its own demands for more water, transportation and other infrastructure.
7. The Plan asserts the need to lessen automobile uses and the accompanying CO2 emissions, yet it assumes that the new housing planned will not bring more cars! There is no legal way to ensure that low income or very low income people who move into those units will not drive cars, nor is there any way to say that these residents will not take advantage of the low rent housing yet still drive into San Francisco to work. Are we supposed to provide low cost housing for San Francisco?
8. It is important to consider the fact that in Marin County, not only is housing not affordable, but also the general cost of living here is too expensive for people of low income. The lack of cheap public transit almost demands car ownership (How else would this workforce get to work?). The facts now are that bus service is being cut back and proposals for jitneys and other means of public transport that may reduce reliance on the automobile in the future are still at the dream stage. The other generally higher costs in this county for goods and services, do not make life affordable for people of modest means with little disposable income whether or not the rent is low.

We conclude that the proposed HOD for the Tam Planning Area is unsustainable and therefore contradicts the Plan’s expressed goal of creating a more sustainable Marin. The same reason to reject the HOD for the area applies to the proposed change of parcel designations on the east side of Shoreline Highway from RS to NC with a higher FAR and more housing, as well as a projected increase in density on the west side at the shopping center area. This increased allowable density not only flies in the face of environmental realities (traffic, available water from MMWD, sea rise, liquefaction, etc.) but is also of questionable legality as a gift of public funds, given the expressed desire of

the County (and indeed desire of the local community for over 25 years) to purchase the Martin Triangle, since an increase in density for that parcel will increase its purchase value.

Further, the CWP and the DEIR appears to accept “Growth” as a given. “Growth” is the mantra of our political/economic system and has been anointed by many as the sine quo non of human progress. Yet, if we can learn anything from those who study and analyze the world’s emerging environmental problems, it is “Growth” that is endangering sustainable life on earth, in terms of both population growth, as such, and supplying goods to serve the perceived needs of that population. (For an overview of this perspective we recommend two books that many of you are probably familiar with, *Limits to Growth* by Meadows and Randers and *Collapse* by Jared Diamond.) So every conceivable indicator---global warming, rising tides, availability of mineral resources, water and air degradation, point to the urgent need to slow and stop growth. Bringing this concept to bear on the local scene: Why plan to promote more growth? If Marin County really intends to be a pace maker in the area of sustainability, then any responsible County Plan would promote, if not a decrease in population, then certainly a stop to encouraging growth of residences and commercial enterprises in our County that would by their very existence negatively impact our environmental resources.

We ask that the Planning Commission reject the HOD for the Tam Planning area and that you reject any change in land use designation that promotes more dense development of the parcels in the Junction area on both sides of the highway. Recognizing the environmental safety and health hazards mentioned above would be enough to reject the current plan to increase density in the Area. When the predicted sea level rise was introduced at the Hearing, the reaction was to dismiss that element of risk because it was in “the future that no one can predict”; we need to apply the Precautionary Principle to this issue (the precautionary principle is urged in the CWP as something every department should utilize). Although we may not be able to forecast exactly how much and when this sea level rise will occur, the consequence of it’s predicted occurrence would be serious in terms of public safety and health hazards. Applying this principle in the current county planning process would mean not overloading an already stressed community and threatened natural environment at and near Tam Junction. Increasing density and then supposedly “mitigating it” by relying on construction techniques and elevated buildings to somehow withstand floods, high tides, earthquakes and rising sea levels is not choosing the safest, smartest precautionary direction for planning. If the Tam Planning Area is the only location you can identify for intense development, we submit that this County is at the limits to growth.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann and Gene Spake

Cc Alex Hines and the County Board of Supervisors