

March 9, 2007

Marin County Planning Commission
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 308
San Rafael, CA 94903
Re: Marin County Wide Plan Update

Dear Marin County Planning Commissioners,

Our general observation of the Draft Marin Countywide Plan (Draft CWP) is that the plan proposes many top down sweeping county-wide changes that are inappropriate for the specific needs of many individual communities. This is particularly true for changes that impact the Tamalpais Community Plan Area (Almonte, Tam Valley, Homestead, and Muir Woods Park). The proposed changes encourage high density development and a population surge in these districts, which are incapable of coping with such intense growth.

We urge you to reject the portions of the Draft CWP which increase allowable density and encourage development standard adjustments (i.e. relaxation of height restrictions and parking requirements) in the Tamalpais Community Plan Area. We specifically recommend the following:

- 1) The Housing Overlay Designation (HOD) of the Draft CWP should be removed, in its entirety, from Tam Valley and Almonte
- 2) The changes made to the "Land Use Categories" section which increase allowable density (including increases in the allowable number of units and the allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR)), should be revoked.
- 3) Development Standards should remain the same as those of the 1994 CWP.
- 4) The current allowable build-out in the area should be reduced.

In order to make our case, we shall highlight multiple circumstances in which the Draft CWP further exacerbates existing problems and impedes local long term goals and traditional values.

Traffic Congestion

The communities bordering Hwy 1 and Almonte Blvd are drowning in congestion. Hwy 1, with a Level of Service "F", is the most congested hwy in Marin County. There is no known feasible solution to bring the traffic impact down to an acceptable level. It is unknown how the area will be able to cope with traffic generated by existing allowable build out. This is not just the 419 units already allowed to be built in the Tamalpais Community Plan Area but also the 950 units allowed to be built in the City of Mill Valley as well as the already allowed build out of Stinson Beach and Bolinas. The average Marin household consists of 2.35 people and generates approximately 11.3 car trips per day. All of these communities use Hwy 1 as their regular commuter route to get to Hwy 101. It is also unknown how to curb the trend of ever growing tourist traffic that uses Hwy 1 to access Muir Woods and other local sightseer destinations. Warm weekends act as a magnet for tourists. Global Warming is expected to bring many more warm weekends and thus many more tourists. **Yet, the Draft CWP targets the Hwy 1 corridor for more population and development that will make the area's congestion even worse.**

Water Deficit

The Marin Municipal Water District is currently operating at a deficit. The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Marin CWP Update states that the problems associated with the water deficit are projected to get worse. Per the Marin IJ article entitled "Climate Change Threat": "Climate models are saying there will be a greater level of variability, more severe droughts, droughts that last longer," said Marin Municipal Water District board member David Behar. "Right now Marin is not ready for any kind of drought. Demand would

also grow because of greater heat." Thus, the Tamalpais Community Plan Area currently experiences a water shortage. **Yet, the Draft CWP targets the area for a substantial increase in population and dense development and an increase in water usage.**

Lack of Safe Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

The Almonte and Tam Valley communities have a severe lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, such that people have been placed in harms way. **Yet, the Draft CWP targets the communities for substantial population growth and a substantial increase in pedestrians and bicyclists, who will also be placed in harms way.**

Deficit of Safe Off-Street Parking

The Tamalpais Community Plan Area is deficient in safe off-street parking. Residents, business patrons, commuters, and tourists (who park their cars all day to ride their bikes) all compete for a limited supply of parking spaces. Tam Valley's and Almonte's narrow streets, already taxed, are regularly crowded with parked cars, making passage unsafe (including passage of emergency vehicles). (Both the County Sheriffs Department and the Southern Marin Fire Department will corroborate this.) Commuters, who would like to use Public Transit, drive their cars to work instead because they can not find parking spaces near Manzanita and other bus stops. The result is illegal parking which clogs unsafe streets and adds to the congested condition. **Yet, the Draft CWP's development standard adjustments call for a relaxation of parking requirements.**

Preservation of Environmentally Sensitive & Valued Natural Habitat

With only 3% of the Bay Area wetlands remaining, Bothin Marsh, home of endangered species, is an extremely valuable and delicate marshland and should be preserved and restored as much as possible. It is feared that close proximity of dense heavy structures and concentrated population will place the vulnerable waterway and wetland habitats in danger. **Yet, many of the parcels slated for increased allowable density (up to 30 units per acre) sit in close proximity to (and many sit right next to) Bothin Marsh as well as Coyote Creek and the Bay.**

Furthermore, for decades the Tam Valley and Almonte residents have held dear a dream to restore the East side of Shoreline back to pristine marsh. **Yet, the proposed changes to the Land Use Categories target these parcels for a major increase in density & Floor Area Ratio (FAR), potentially resulting in larger, bulkier, heavier and more populated buildings. Moreover, increasing the allowable build out of the parcels may increase their value, making it more difficult to purchase the parcels for restoration. This is in direct opposition to the communities' vision.**

Three Hazard Zone

The soil conditions of the Tamalpais Valley lowlands are that of landfill placed on top of what used to be marshland. The result is a three hazard zone (a seismic activity zone, a liquefaction zone, and a flood zone). Homes built on this type of soil have experienced severe sinking. Sewage pipes lying in identical soil conditions have ruptured due to one side of the pipe sinking at a different pace than the rest of the pipe. These are similar conditions to the San Francisco Marina which suffered tremendously during the Loma Prieta Earthquake. The February 1st, 2007 Marin IJ article, entitled "Climate Change Threat" indicates that, due to global warming, tides will rise 3 feet over the next 50 to 100 years. Flooding in Almonte and Tam Valley is destined to occur more frequently and rise to greater heights, until the entire Tamalpais Valley lowlands could be under water. Such hazardous conditions increase construction costs and the risk of building damage and personal injury. The perils of this location make it an inappropriate site to be targeted for high density development and a surge in population. **Yet, the Draft CWP does just that and targets the Tamalpais Valley lowlands (a 3 hazard zone) for high density development and a surge in population, potentially placing future residents in harms way.**

Valued Traditional Character

The traditional character of Almonte, Tam Valley, Homestead, and Muir Woods Park is that of quiet peaceful neighborhoods consisting of typically smaller homes with generous yard/garden areas and proximity to open space. Any business sections have been downplayed to generate a small town or rural feel. **Yet, the density allowed by the Draft CWP's "Housing Overlay Designation" (HOD) and the Draft CWP's "Land Use Categories" would greatly change this desired character. The HOD's allowable density of 30 units per acre and the Land Use Categories' allowable density of 30 to 45 units per acre, with large, two to three story buildings, compact units and no outdoor living space is more appropriate for a crowded downtown city environment, not for an area that wishes to remain primarily residential and green.**

In conclusion, we implore you to act in the best interest of the thousands of residents who live in the Tamalpais Community Plan Area. We urge you to:

- 1) Remove the Draft CWP's Housing Overlay Designation, in its entirety, from the Tam Valley and Almonte Districts.
- 2) Revoke the changes made to the "Land Use Categories" section of the Draft CWP, which increase allowable density.
- 3) Keep Development Standards the same as those of the 1994 CWP.
- 4) Moreover, please help us to lower the Tamalpais Community Plan Area's current allowable build-out as delineated in the 1994 Plan.

To approve the Draft Marin Countywide Plan as is would threaten the health of one of the Bay Area's last remaining marshlands, cause undue hardship to the involved residents and change our quality of life and community for the worse.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Very truly yours,

Sharon Rushton
President
Almonte District Improvement Club

Cc: Marin County Board of Supervisors
Cc: Alex Hinds, Director, Marin County Community Development Agency