

Beware of Funding Agreements Tied to Increased Development!

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Hi Sustainable TamAlmonte Friends,

Attached is the funding agreement between the City of Larkspur and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for the Larkspur SMART Station Area Plan and the Plan's EIR. The grant is a clear example of why a jurisdiction should NOT accept funding that is tied to planning for more development, unless the jurisdiction truly wants a lot more development.

According to Larkspur Vice Mayor Larry Chu's Marin Voice; "Larkspur Landing's Planning Challenge" (5/16/14), the City of Larkspur entered into the grant agreement because, due to voter approval of the Larkspur SMART station, the City needed a plan to accommodate the station and didn't have the staff or money to do so.

Per Larry Chu's Marin Voice; "We found ourselves needing to plan for things like circulation, access and parking within and around the station. We also needed to address the state's requirement to identify and plan for opportunity housing sites, particularly within a half-mile radius of a transit station."

In her Marin Voice: "Larkspur Landing Questions That Need Answers" (4/26/14), Larkspur Mayor Ann Morrison states that Larkspur engaged in the Station Area Plan process primarily because "the Council was and is interested in the implications for vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian flow in and around the station."

So, the City wanted, above all, a circulation, access and parking plan. Unfortunately, they ended up with a plan that focused heavily on planning for a huge amount of new development. Larry Chu again; "The terms of the grant required expanding beyond what the city would have done."

As described in the MTC Resolution 3434, which I discussed in yesterday's email, a priority for MTC is to increase revenue for SMART by increasing Transit Ridership by stimulating construction of housing along SMART's transit corridor. Such a policy is highly questionable, especially considering the latest US Census showed that, from Year 1990 to Year 2012, the use of public transit by Marin residents, who worked and were over the age of 16, declined from 10.2% to 8.6%.

The funding agreement defines what the funds can be used for and thus defines what the Station Area Plan would accomplish. If you read the funding agreement, you will see that it is filled with terms like "urbanization", "urban design guidelines", and "land use intensification". And so much for the

importance of planning for circulation, it didn't even make it on the "Priority Objective" list.

Richard Hall, who through a Public Records Act request reviewed many public records pertaining to the Larkspur Station Area Plan, reports; "The documents reveal a pattern of a consistent and clear departure from local control and addressing current issues front of mind for Larkspur's residents and Larkspur's council. The Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) clearly represents to MTC & ABAG that Larkspur has issues with parking and circulation and seeks confirmation of whether these can be prioritized. The response is that no, they cannot be prioritized." (Richard Hall's Blog Planning For Reality; "Record Request Revelations: The Larkspur SAP")

What is especially telling is that the funding agreement requires that the funding agencies make up the majority of the "Project Steering Committee" (PSC) for the Station Area Plan, most of which are BIG proponents of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), "Smart Growth", and Plan Bay Area.

EXCERPT from the Funding Agreement, Page 6:

"The Station Area Plan project involves five funding agencies in addition to the PRIMARY FUNDER, Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC): the City of Larkspur, the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM); the County of Marin; the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District (SMART); and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD). A representative from each of these agencies shall comprise the Project Steering Committee (PSC), which shall meet periodically to track progress, review draft documents, and provide direction and recommendations on project tasks."

And again representatives from the funding agencies are on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) too.

Resulting Station Area Plan:

The Larkspur Station Area Plan does include Section 5. ""Access Circulation and Parking" but it doesn't seem to do a thorough job (although it includes some good ideas) and doesn't really address how commuters will safely and easily get from the SMART station to the Ferry & vice versa, especially in times of bad weather. As directed by the grant, the focus of the Station Area Plan appears to be "establishment of a land use plan and policy framework that will guide development and redevelopment (with urban design guidelines) within the area towards land uses that will support transit ridership."

It seems that the power was/is with those who held the purse strings in regards to what was and was not incorporated into the Larkspur Station

Area Plan. One can see how the City of Larkspur didn't have much say once they accepted the funding agreement and the process was set in motion.

Questions that come to mind:

- Why did the City of Larkspur accept the funding agreement with MTC for the Station Area Plan?
- Couldn't the City of Larkspur afford a circulation, access & parking plan - OR - Isn't there another source for funding that doesn't require increased development?
- Wouldn't new development obviate benefits achieved through improved circulation?
- Wouldn't the costs related to increased development (costs for improvements to public infrastructure, public utilities, public services, mitigation of environmental impacts, ect.) far exceed funding received from MTC?

Lesson learned:

To maintain local control, Marin jurisdictions need to find alternative funding sources for plans and improvements than those sources that mandate planning for more development. This may mean we will need to tax ourselves.

Best regards,
Sharon

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