

## **Recap of the May 6th Tam Valley Workshop re: the County's Housing Plan**

The County tried to rush workshop participants to a pre-determined conclusion, rather than have an open discussion with the Community and allow for an exchange of information and ideas about how to provide for the County's Housing Need. The workshop's agenda included:

1) **PRESENTATION:** A short presentation by LeeLee Thomas (County Planner) and a film demonstrating the need for affordable housing but providing little additional information relative to the topic:

- A) The presentation focused on affordable housing but did not point out that the Housing Element sites could be developed with mostly market-rate housing;
- B) The presentation talked about Marin's strong environmental protections but failed to mention the Countywide Plan Amendment that allows for more potential high-density housing in the Baylands Corridor, the Ridge and Upland Greenbelt, and other environmentally sensitive areas;
- C) The presentation indicated that future proposed development would receive thorough review but failed to mention the State laws that allow for streamlining and exemption of environmental review. Moreover, there was no mention of the State Density Bonus Law that supersedes County regulations and allows for greater densities and exceptions to height restrictions, setbacks, and parking regulations, which can throw typical County development standards out the window;
- D) There was no mention of studies by respected institutions that prove that living near busy roads emitting large amounts of Toxic Air Contaminants over large periods of time significantly increases the risk of developing serious and life-threatening illnesses (E.g. Cardiovascular mortality, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, miscarriages, asthma, etc.);
- E) There was no mention of alternative approaches to meeting Marin's housing needs, rather than new development on preselected sites, such as conversion of existing market-rate units to affordable units, second units, rent vouchers, a living wage, low interest loans, etc.

2) **LIMITED Q&A:** A very brief moment of answering questions and no time for taking any comments, chaired by a very expensive (\$250/hr with a contract cap of \$31,000 for 5 workshops) outside consultant, Kate Powers. About a third of the audience were left with their hands up. One of the Power Point slides presented by the County stated; "We want to hear from you." My question: "Really?"

3) **SMALL GROUP EXERCISE:** Rushing participants into small groups at separate tables to identify sites for new housing from a small pre-selected list of sites (mind you - with just a map and a brief paragraph about each site). No information was given about the maximum potential buildout at a site or how

development at a site would impact the environment, traffic, public services (E.g. schools), public infrastructure, public health and safety, water supply or the traditional neighborhood character, etc.; and

4) **BRIEF DEBRIEFS:** A brief debrief from a recorder at each table, answering 3 specific questions that the County had prepared in advance. The commentary was a consensus of the residents at a given table. So, they never allowed any individuals to make public comments.

## RESULT

The participants didn't reach the conclusion that the County had hoped for. No sites were selected at any table and most of the final comments from the various groups expressed the need for more information, how flawed the process of the workshop was, and dissatisfaction with the site list (E.g. Dissatisfaction with the County for still considering to target the hazardous Tam Junction sites with new high density housing).

The County Planners stated that public input from the workshop would be passed along to County officials. Hopefully, they will not infer that they sought out public opinion or that the public participated in selecting sites for the Housing Element's Sites Inventory.