

**SUSTAINABLE TAMALMONTE
215 JULIA AVENUE
MILL VALLEY, CA 94941**

July 10, 2014

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 329
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: The Spring 2014 Public Workshops pertaining to the Marin County Housing Element Update (2015 to 2023)

Dear Marin County Board of Supervisors,

We are greatly dismayed with the process and format of the public workshops held in Spring 2014 pertaining to the Marin County Housing Element Update 2015 to 2023. We request that this letter be included in the public record regarding the Housing Element Update and hope that the upcoming Housing Element public hearings will provide a better opportunity for more thorough consideration of public input.

We believe there are constructive solutions for meeting the housing needs of all Marin's constituents, including lower-income households, in a manner that upholds community character; respects the limits of our infrastructure, public services, financial capabilities, and natural resources (E.g. water); protects the environment and public health and safety; and enhances quality of life. Unfortunately, the format of the Housing Element workshops did not allow such constructive solutions to be discovered or even discussed. On the contrary, the workshops failed to provide vital information for intelligent decision-making and only offered one predetermined housing solution - a forced choice of preselected housing sites.

Our specific concerns regarding the Spring 2014 Housing Element workshops are:

General Format

1. We are concerned that the workshop format did not give Marin residents an opportunity to have questions answered and to offer constructive solutions;
2. We are concerned that the County hired a very expensive outside consultant to chair the workshops, which was entirely unnecessary;

3. We are concerned that the only solution discussed for meeting Marin's Housing Needs was new housing development (much of it high-density multifamily units) on preselected sites. There was no mention of alternative approaches to meeting Marin's housing needs, such as:
 - A. Conversion of existing market-rate units to affordable units;
 - B. Second units;
 - C. Rent vouchers;
 - D. A living wage;
 - E. Low interest loans, etc.

Presentation

4. We are concerned that the presentation lacked vital information and that comments by facilitators were misleading, such as:
 - 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;
 - D. The presentation indicated that future proposed development would need to adhere to local design guidelines and development standards but failed to mention the State Density Law that supersedes County regulations and allows for greater densities and exceptions to height restrictions, setbacks, and parking regulations. The presentation also failed to mention County regulations and development codes that allow exceptions for affordable housing;
 - E. Facilitators stated that housing should be placed near transportation but failed to mention that many studies by respected institutions prove that living near busy roads emitting large amounts of Toxic Air Contaminants over large periods of time significantly increase the risk of developing serious and life-threatening illnesses (E.g. Cardiovascular mortality, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, miscarriages, asthma, autism, etc.);

Selection of Sites

5. We are concerned that participants were asked to select sites for housing from a pre-selected list of sites but were not provided critical information about the proposed housing sites, such as the maximum potential buildout at each site and how development at each site would impact:

- A. The environment;
 - B. Public health and safety;
 - C. Traffic;
 - D. Public services (E.g. schools);
 - E. Public infrastructure;
 - F. Water supply;
 - G. Traditional neighborhood character, etc.
6. We are concerned that participants were asked to "vote" about neighborhoods where they did not reside.

We DID appreciate the fact that the comments from the audience were recorded as they were made. That helps to build trust, and trust needs to be restored.

Moving Forward

As previously described, each Housing Element workshop was orchestrated to rush participants to a pre-determined conclusion, rather than allow for an open discussion, an exchange of information and ideas, intelligent decision making, and the discovery of innovative solutions about how to provide for Unincorporated Marin's Housing Need in a manner that would be more acceptable to all interested parties.

In order to prevent similar unproductive and financially wasteful workshops, we urge you to direct the Community Development Agency to revise the process and format of future workshops.

Moreover, the County Planners stated that public input from the Housing Element workshops would be conveyed to the Marin County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Therefore, we request that this letter be included in the public record regarding the Marin County Housing Element Update (2015 to 2023).

Most importantly, we ask you to ensure that the upcoming Housing Element public hearings provide a better opportunity for more thorough consideration of public input.

Very truly yours,

/s/

Sharon Rushton

Chairperson

Sustainable TamAlmonte

Cc: Marin County Planning Commission