

Opinion

Marin Independent Journal

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The Independent Journal's editorial board meets weekly to talk about the paper's editorial positions. The board currently has four members.

EDITORIAL

Novato OKs 'model' for helping homeless

NOVATO CITY COUNCILMAN ERIC LUCAN predicts that Oma Village will be "a shining star and a model."

The foundation for this "shining star" — the 14-unit apartment complex off Nave Drive, just south of Hamilton — certainly is strong.

Oma Village is the long-planned extension of Homeward Bound's work to help homeless men, women and families get off the streets and onto a track toward finding work and a home.

The Novato City Council's 4-0 vote approved plans to transform a half acre off Highway 101 into transitional housing for Homeward Bound family clients.

It is one more tool for Homeward Bound's efforts to help its family clients reverse the downward spiral of homelessness.

The apartment complex, which was designed by Blu Homes and scored high on the city's goals of environment-friendly development, will have low rents, but also require tenants to help maintain the property.

For many years, Homeward Bound has served as a model for Marin's efforts to help people out of homelessness. If there is a shortcoming in plans for Oma Village, it is that the need is greater than its size.

But Homeward Bound has helped many people off the streets and provided them with a safe respite where they can get the help they need to find a job and housing.

While much local political debate has centered on battles over affordable housing, there were no trenches dug for the Oma

Village proposal.

Backers of the project included the Marin Organizing Committee, an organization that has called for improved services for local homeless; the Marin Interfaith Council and Stand Up for Neighborly Novato, a local housing advocacy group.

In addition, more than \$3.5 million has already been raised for the project. The Peter J. Haas Family Fund in June established a grant-matching campaign where the fund will match contributions of up to \$100,000.

As Councilwoman Madeline Kellner said at the July 23 council meeting, it has taken a village to create Oma Village.

Homeward Bound — with its New Beginnings dorms, Next Key studio apartments and its job-training center — has been a model for the kinds of community benefits that can occur with the re-use of old military bases, such as Hamilton.

Homeward Bound is an example of Marin stepping forward to meet and help resolve social problems. Novato's support for rezoning commercial land for housing is another.

The high cost of housing in Marin makes the goal of meeting local housing needs even tougher. More needs to be done. But Oma Village represents another step in finding ways to help people in need.

It is an example where instead of being at loggerheads, we find the right location, the right opportunity, the right design and strong funding to build affordable housing that Marin needs.



MARIN VOICE

Overreacting to bay plan

DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn of Sausalito is president of TRANSDEF.org, a transit advocacy organization.

take away their guns and their property rights, and force them into high-density housing. They seem gripped by the fear that the regional plan will harm them personally.

I wonder where these bizarre ideas came from, and why people accept them so uncritically.

Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding is over local control. Nothing in the regional plan forces any jurisdiction to do anything. Regional agencies don't have the legal powers to make planning and zoning decisions.

(Yes, there are requirements to plan for affordable housing, but that is a state mandate, not a regional one.)

Local governments — not the regional agencies — defined the "Priority Development Areas," which are where they would like to locate future jobs and housing.

The state requires planning for housing for a growing population. The strategy of the Bay Area's regional plan is to concentrate the new housing in walkable communities with good transit, with these benefits:

- ▶ It leaves existing single-family neighborhoods undisturbed.

- ▶ It reduces future traffic, because new residents drive less.

- ▶ It reduces emissions of air pollutants, including greenhouse gases.

- ▶ It is economically feasible, because young adults and empty nesters want to live where they can walk to stores, cafes and restaurants.

- ▶ It preserves open space.

Overzealous opponents seem to want to close the county's borders and freeze both time and the county's racial makeup. Yet the projected growth in population comes mostly from our own children and grandchildren, plus some of the people who will work here.

Santa Clara County is projected to have 26 times more housing growth than Marin, which is projected to have the lowest percentage growth of all the Bay Area counties. Yet Marin residents sent in more comments objecting to the regional plan than any other county.

These Marinites have vocalized their uniquely overwrought grievances in a series of combative public meetings.

With norms of respectful conduct out the window, anyone with opposing views faced a threatening mob mentality.

This oppressive behavior undermines the willingness of residents to participate in government, either as elected officials or community volunteers.

This is no way to solve problems. Managing inevitable growth requires rationality and a willingness to listen to others.

It's not an option to demand that the future not come to Marin.

READERS' FORUM

Wayward leadership

I have read, with considerable amusement, the excuses offered by our two county supervisors to explain their votes to approve Plan Bay Area.

In spite of a huge number of citizens who rallied against the regional plan, both of them felt compelled to ignore the wishes of the voters and are now trying to justify their votes.

Both claim that land issues will be decided locally. However, Plan Bay Area provides for developers to sue if local planners do not allow high-density projects.

It also advocates streamlined planning in which the

California Environmental Quality Act could be compromised.

Furthermore, Supervisor Katie Rice states that changes to our general plan could only be made by the local governing authority. Based on the their decision to ignore the citizenry, that is precisely the problem.

Both supervisors mention preventing sprawl in Marin. However, there has never been sprawl in this county, and there is no room or money to support it now.

Building four-story apartment buildings in Priority Development Areas has nothing to do with preventing sprawl in Marin.

Oddly enough, neither of these supervisors seem to understand the differences between communities like Marin, which are essentially suburban and poorly serviced by efficient public transportation, and those where this type of housing would be useful and possibly welcomed.

They appear to have bought into the idea that state agencies can govern growth better than we, the citizens of Marin. I vehemently disagree.

Linda Rames, MILL VALLEY

Dissent is healthy

I began to wonder recently: "When was the last time a Board of Supervisors' vote was other than 5-0?"

Is this board so concerned with presenting a "united front" that none of them will dare vote against the other four?

After all, why be against each other when the Board of Supervisors is already united against the people in whose interest they were elected to serve.

Carol Sheerin, SAN RAFAEL

NIMBYs and rental housing

In all the brouhaha caused by trying to build affordable housing and cannot be returned. They may be republished in any publication of the Marin Independent Journal. Because of the volume of submissions, we cannot respond individually.

A good friend recently downsizing from a home rental, now lives at one of Marinwood's few condo developments.

First came months of craigslist, word-of-mouth referrals and the odd "For Rent" sign flashing in a drive-by hunt, only to find that landing an apartment that doesn't furnish an installed washer/dryer, demands four-figure rents.

We need to remember that portion of the "99 percent" who will be permanent renters.

Once it was "feathers and hot tubs" which characterized Marin County. Can we afford the scourge of "racist" NIMBY?

Marian Blanton, SAN RAFAEL

Letters

Confine them to 250 words. We don't have room for all of the letters we receive; we give preference to shorter letters and to letters from people who live in Marin or Southern Sonoma counties. Letters are edited for length, grammar, spelling, clarity, style, libel and civility. We do not

publish form letters, "open" letters, petitions, individual consumer complaints or letters published elsewhere. Letters must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number so we can verify authorship (we publish only the writer's name and hometown).

Marin Voices

Columns are limited to 600 words and are edited like letters (see left). We give preference to writers who have personal or professional expertise on a topic. Submissions must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number for verification of authorship.

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All submissions become the property of the Marin Independent Journal and cannot be returned. They may be republished in any publication of the Marin Independent Journal. Because of the volume of submissions, we cannot respond individually.

Contact

EMAIL: opinion@marinij.com
PHONE: 382-7291

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