



@ HOME in NOVATO

Novato Housing Coalition Newsletter February 2009

Creating Sustainable Communities

February 25, 2009

6:30 pm - 9:00 pm

Next Key Center

1385 N. Hamilton Pkwy

Come learn how the key components of sustainability can be hard-wired into our community plans, and how citizens, planners, and elected officials can all be part of these exciting changes.

novatohousing.org/SustainForum.html



Suzanne is the Associate Director of the St. Vincent De Paul Society of Marin. The Warming Shelter is a huge mental

relief for Suzanne because she doesn't have to worry about people sleeping in the cold and rain. She and her husband, Robert, were homeless for five years. Fortunately, with the help of various agencies, including St. Vincent de Paul, they were able to get into their first apartment shortly before their son Austin was born. The family now lives at Creekside affordable housing in Novato.

Shelter in Marin

By Suzanne Walker

I work at the St. Vincent de Paul homeless desk in San Rafael. For years, my biggest frustration has been the lack of shelter beds for our homeless clients, particularly in the cold and wet winter. This year things are different! After more than a year working with other members of the Marin Organizing Committee (MOC), a plan was formulated to open a warming center for anyone in need of shelter.

On **December 10**, more than 250 people participated in a candlelight procession in downtown San Rafael to call on county and municipal officials to fund shelters. On **December 17**, the county implemented the MOC plan for a temporary warming center at the National Guard Armory in San Rafael. This plan involves the collaboration of the Helen Vine Detox Center, Homeward Bound, Ritter Center, the Marin Interfaith Street Chaplaincy, and the St Vincent de Paul Society. Each night, from 50-80 people take advantage of the warming center. This program remains in place through April 1, 2009. To help through volunteering or donating, contact Chris Highland, chris@naturetemple.net.

A permanent open shelter is desperately needed year-round. Homelessness is an ongoing problem that can only increase in today's economic climate.

You can help by advising your city and county officials that a permanent shelter is a critical need. MOC is a broad-based organization of religious congregations and non-profit institutions working to shape Marin County's public policy for the common good.

We depend on our individual donors to help us close our funding gap. Our recent fund drive brought in over \$700. About \$5 from each of the rest of you would meet our challenges that are coming up with the General Plan Update, and the Burdell Commons proposal. Please use the enclosed envelope for your tax-deductible contribution and make your check payable to EAH/Novato Housing Coalition. Thanks so much!

Novato General Plan Update

By Frank Keenan

Novato has begun a three-year process to update its General Plan. I have been invited to serve on a Steering Committee to help direct the course of action. There will be opportunity for you to participate in telephone surveys, a number of public workshops, and public hearings as well.

The General Plan is largely a plan for land use and zoning. Housing will be a critical issue in the early part of the process as both the North Redwood Boulevard planning study and the Housing Element update will be crafted. There is considerable support behind adding more retail business in Novato in order to generate needed sales tax dollars. Unfortunately, this could come at the loss of much needed additional affordable housing. I believe we need to maintain a balance of both. You need to make sure your voice is heard loud and clear by City Council, Planning Commission, and Steering Committee members at the public workshop on March 5. For more information, go to

<http://www.ci.novato.ca.us/Index.aspx?>



From the Chair...

2009 will be a year of financial challenges for the City of Novato and for some of its residents. Some homeowners struggle to make mortgage payments and a few are losing their homes. The City faces serious budget shortages.

2009 is also a year of opportunity for Novato. The General Plan Update process has finally begun in earnest. The first two issues to be addressed are North Redwood Boulevard redevelopment and the Housing Element, both high priority issues for Novato Housing Coalition. NHC will closely follow the work of the General Plan Steering Committee and the City Council. We will let you know when we

need your support at some of the public meetings about North Redwood or the Housing Element (Mar. 5 at Margaret Todd Center, 6:30)

NHC is also closely following the Commons at Mt. Burdell (Fireman's Fund) development proposal, which includes 150 apartment units. NHC would like to see more of these rental units be affordable, and we are working with the developer, the City, and other community groups to achieve that. Work on the Environmental Impact Report is just beginning. The first step is a Scoping Session, which will be held early this spring. You'll also hear more from us on that.

Therefore, the bottom line is lots of important work for NHC and its supporters in 2009. Thanks in advance for your support and your energy.
Katie Crecelius

The Commons at Mt. Burdell

By Nathan Johnson, Greenbelt Alliance

If you haven't heard, there are big changes in the works at the Fireman's Fund business park. The owner of the property, American Assets, Inc., is planning to re-develop the site under a new name, The Commons at Mt. Burdell, and add 150 one and two-bedroom rental units with at least 30 targeted to households earning in the range of \$40,000-\$70,000 per year.

Adding housing to this site makes a lot of sense. For one, somewhere between 6-7 out of every 10 jobs in Novato are held by folks who don't live here, according to a recent County study. Putting more homes near where most of the jobs are located –and in a price range that is affordable--can help correct this imbalance.

The other benefit of putting homes right next to jobs is that it makes it possible for people to

walk or bike to work instead using their cars.

Even if people living at The Commons work somewhere else, say in downtown San Rafael or the Civic Center—the new SMART commuter train will have a stop within walking distance of these homes and people can get to their jobs without ever sitting in Highway 101 traffic congestion!

The project is also expected to generate all its own solar electricity and use far less water than is currently used (in technical terms it's aiming for what's called a LEED platinum rating)..

From this environmentalist's perspective, the re-use and re-development of the Fireman Fund site, and its prime location next to jobs and public transportation, make it a project with great potential.

Please join us this year as we participate in Marin's Human Race event. Mark the date –May 9– for the festivities at the Marin Civic Center in San Rafael. Our Development Director, Betty Patocchi, would like to hear from you if you are interested in this annual fund raising event. Try epat94947@aol.com or phone Betty at 897-9106.

Habitat for Humanity vs. NIMBY

By Charley Wynn

The planned project in Mill Valley/ Strawberry that was the subject of several public debates has been stopped by the need for more financing.

In addition: At a meeting in Redwood City, with Phil Killbridge, E. D., and Jim Murray, Director of Governmental Affairs, of Habitat for Humanity, Greater San Francisco, I was advised that Habitat intends to work with lenders to rehab foreclosed, abandoned, single family homes and sell them to qualified buyers in Novato.

Novato Housing Coalition

PO Box 1297

Novato 94948

415 898-7730

info@novatohousing.org

www.novatohousing.org