



BENNETT VALLEY VOICE

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

BENNETT VALLEY HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

JANUARY, 1978



BENNETT VALLEY'S FUTURE – YOU HAVE A CHOICE

Early in 1977, after a year on the Board of Supervisors, I became increasingly concerned about the pattern of haphazard residential development which I saw occurring in Bennett Valley. The document guiding that development was the Bennett Valley Area Study adopted five years earlier in one of the county's pioneer efforts to plan for future development. While the area study had been a great stride forward at the time, it had, by 1977, proved inadequate.

The basic concept of the original area study was "slope density zoning." Under that principle the flat areas of the valley, often the most prime agricultural soils, were allowed to be divided into two-acre parcels. As the steepness of the terrain increased, parcel size minimums reached a maximum of ten acres. The projected population under the area study's guideline was 7,500 people—more than three times the present population (approximately 2,000). The plan had not considered the major and costly road improvements that such a large population would require.

An added problem was that development in most other rural areas of the county was occurring under more restrictive area studies for general plan guidelines. This fact provided an incentive for development to take advantage of Bennett Valley's "loser" zoning. The result was a great amount of lot-splitting.

I felt that unless action was taken soon Bennett Valley would lose its unique rural character and then become another suburban extension of Santa Rosa.

I took the issue to the Bennett Valley Homeowners Association, which had been an advisory body to the Board of Supervisors since the adoption of the original area study.

Members of the association board shared my

concern and set about notifying area residents that a meeting would be held (in spring of 1977) to allow citizens and county officials to discuss the problem and possible courses of action.

That citizen's meeting, attended by 80 to 100 residents, turned out to be the first of three such meetings. Support was strong for a new citizens/planning staff study of the area and for the adoption of emergency zoning to apply while the new study was in progress.

In July the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted emergency interim zoning establishing a five-acre minimum. They later placed a new Bennett Valley Study at the top of the Board's list of planning priorities (the county's legal counsel later advised the Board that the five-acre interim zoning was inconsistent with the basic policies of the county's general plan and as such it could be effectively challenged because of the current litigation regarding the general plan in which the county is engaged with the Attorney General). The planning staff then proposed interim zoning consistent with densities ranging from five to twenty acres per dwelling unit (see maps at the county planning department). This was presented at the third meeting of Bennett Valley residents for discussion and was adopted as the interim zoning by the Board on January 10.

A soon-to-be appointed Bennett Valley Citizens Advisory Committee will work closely with planning staff to develop the new land use plan for Bennett Valley. The involvement of concerned Bennett Valley residents in the upcoming discussions and workshops will be extremely important. If you're interested in the future of Bennett Valley now is the time to get involved.

Brian Kahn 1st District Supervisor

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NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Do you have any concerns you would like to share with your neighbors? Do you have any questions to which you would like some answers? Come to the next B.V.H.A. board meeting and share them with your neighbors. All board meetings are open to the entire membership. They are held each fourth Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. at the firehouse, 6161 Bennett Valley Road.

If you are unable to attend those meetings, you can still make your concerns known by writing to the VOICE in care of John or Cindy Bridgwater, 5350 Sonoma Mountain Road.



LOOK – LISTEN – LEARN

Membership in the Bennett Valley Homeowners Association is open to all Bennett Valley property owners. By becoming a member you will continue to get editions of the VOICE as well as being among many valley residents who want to be heard with regard to the careful planning of our neighborhood.

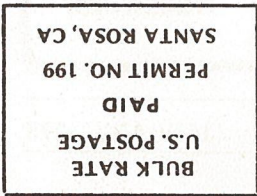
One year's membership is only \$5.00 which can be sent to the return address on this newsletter. Those of you who have a "1978" on your mailing label are registered as having a membership good through 1978.

BECOME A MEMBER NOW !!!



BENNETT VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT PANCAKE DAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1978

Meet your friends and neighbors at the Bennett Valley Volunteer Fire Department Pancake Day, Sunday, February 19 at the firehouse, 6161 Bennett Valley Road from 7:00 a.m. until ????. It's an "all you can eat" pancake breakfast with plenty of ham, juice, coffee and milk. Call John Bridgwater, 528-3836, for advance tickets at \$2.50 for adults and \$1.50 for children.



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Post Office Box 2666

BENNETT VALLEY HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

VOICE OF THE FUTURE

Whether you are a newcomer to Bennett Valley or an "oldtimer" you have seen the signs of change in Bennett Valley.

The Bennett Valley Homeowners Association was born in 1971 because of an impending change that disturbed many who lived here at that time. The occasion was a proposed mobile home park on the site of what is now Woodside. It was stopped!

Although there were far fewer people and houses here in 1971, the concern for a proposed project's long-range effect on the character of the valley was felt by many and a public voice was found through the newly formed homeowner's association.

Similarly, we have recently heard both carefully reasoned as well as emotional debate of the merits, or lack thereof, of the recently proposed Summit View Estates on the site of the old Sibbald Ranch on the side of Sonoma Mountain. Strong feelings have been expressed on both sides of this issue and, to date, the matter has found no final resolution.

Ideally, a homeowners association should provide a democratic forum for healthy debate between well informed proponents and opponents of projects such as Summit View.

What actually occurred when the "moment of decision" came for the Board of Directors of the Association (with respect to expressing a position to the Sonoma County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on this controversial project) was that

the Board was forced to express what was effectively *only* the consensus of the Board itself because almost none of the 130 members of the association had expressed any opinion (on either side of the issue) either to the Board or to their fellow members. In fairness to the Board, it must be reported that the position was, in fact, correctly represented publicly as only that of the Board and not of the membership at large.

Of those who are sufficiently interested in Bennett Valley affairs to join the Association, few have the time to diligently attend every meeting . . . or even the majority of meetings. Even those who wanted to attend found it difficult, if not impossible, to find out when and where the meetings were held because there was no formal means of notification.

We hope this maiden issue of the Bennett Valley VOICE will signal the optimistic beginning of a continuing source of information to serve the diverse opinions represented by individual members as well as non-members of the Bennett Valley Homeowners Association.

The VOICE should be just that: The voice of the people of Bennett Valley. We all love this valley and we need a strong medium to make our opinions known to both neighbors and government.

Let us know what *you* think and hopefully the VOICE will act as a powerful amplifier to make your voice heard by all in Bennett Valley and beyond.



SUMMIT VIEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

Last Tuesday, January 24, two public hearings were held for the proposed Summit View Development on Sonoma Mountain. The first focused on the Environmental Impact Report presented to the Board of Supervisors. After discussion concerning the need for additional geological study of the area and the effects of additional road usage if the property is developed, the EIR was accepted by the supervisors.

The second public hearing concerned the merits of the development. Those who spoke for it pointed out that the obvious alternative

to a carefully planned development such as Summit View would be the current trend toward lot-splits which would further desecrate the valley. Those who oppose Summit View expressed their fears of land misuse, added road usage, over-burdening of schools and a possibility of additional crime.

There will be a continued public hearing on the merits of the development on February 14, 2:30 in the Supervisors Boardroom.

How do you feel? Be at the hearing—it will be your chance to speak up.

THE "VOICE": REGULAR FEATURES

Upcoming issues of the Bennett Valley VOICE will contain a continuing regular feature column enumerating and describing all lot-split and major subdivision applications and status. Projects and developments of any and every description will be included in this column for your information and consideration. Reader comments on land use will also be a part of this section.

In addition, all actions of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, P.R.A.C., and various other county, state and federal bodies (insofar as they relate to Bennett Valley) will be incorporated into the column.

Other areas of inquiry such as roads, water, utilities, sewage and septic fields, schools, taxes (including special districts), fire protection, zoning, county general plan, building permits and inspections will be related to our readers as information becomes available.

We would like to include names and addresses of newcomers to the valley, too, but we need your help on this one. If you have new neighbors in your area, please let us know so we may let others know of them too.

The VOICE can serve as the "glue" that helps to hold us together as a community, but only if you and your neighbors participate and help.



JANUARY B.V.H.A. BOARD MEETING

Bennett Ridge Phase 4 was presented by Lee Morton, developer. The proposal calls for 23 sites averaging 2.8 acres each, totaling approximately 66 acres. This phase is consistent with the first three projects but not with the general plan for the county. Since Bennett Valley is in a special study and no one knows the outcome of that until at least June, it was moved by the Board to hold consideration of Phase 4 until the June B.V.H.A. board meeting when a more educated evaluation can take place.

Feelings were further expressed by board members that their hands are tied with regard to evaluating any developmental or lot-split proposals until the results of the special study are known.