



BENNETT VALLEY VOICE

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Bennett Valley Homeowners Association

February, 1993

GOLF COURSE AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL BENNETT VALLEY !

The Story So Far:

It has been about a year since stories started circulating about the city of Santa Rosa's plans to build an expanded golf course and housing development at the northern entrance to Bennett Valley. This would include the slopes above Matanzas Creek bridge, and on either side of the road, at the junction where you leave the city and enter the country (see BV Voice, July '92, and Press Democrat, Jan. '93).

Despite continued requests for more information, the city has presented no concrete proposals for review, denying that they exist in any presentable form. However, word has it that plans have been on paper since 1988, and that the various groups who are behind the project are attempting to get their plans and support systems into such a state of completion that it will be virtually "pre-approved". This will be as a result of the political muscle and popular momentum from interest groups outside of the Valley. We are therefore grateful to Supervisor Mike Cale for keeping us apprised of the City's intentions and the County's position on this matter, and for his firm support of our position on the need for finite city boundaries and preserving the integrity of buffer zones.

Why a Golf Course Isn't Suitable:

Many people may think, understandably, that a golf course is consonant with the principle of open space and the ideal of keeping the rural character of the Valley. But take a moment to consider all that a golf course involves (leaving aside for the moment the more obvious impact of a major residential development). First there's the problem of traffic. Most of us want to keep Bennett Valley Road a rural connector route, and resist changes that will push it in the direction of becoming an alternative commuter link. The major

realignment and reconstruction that will be required to accommodate the planned use intensity here places it squarely in this category. The increased traffic that a public 36 hole course would bring, from all directions, would increase the pressure on the County to widen the road. Wider roads lead to higher speeds, and ultimately build the infrastructure for more development. Also, those cars need somewhere to park. Where will you conceal the level tarmac space needed for say 75 cars? A development on this scale needs street lighting at night for both safety and security. Suddenly the whole area starts to lose its feeling of countryside and take on the look of suburbia. After all, a golf course is essentially suburban in character, and has no visual place in the patterns of the country.

Then there is the ecological fact: golf courses use copious amounts of water. In summer there will be the impact of 120 acres of manicured green in a natural landscape of creams and tans. The native trees which exist in this oak woodland community, and give it the character and beauty which we all admire so much, can't tolerate the fungal problems that water and high summer soil temperatures induce. They will develop root rot and die. It takes a decade or more but the end result is inescapable. These are replaced with conifers - most often non-native species - which are able to cope with the new conditions but are invariably inappropriate to the surrounding native setting. And once again the character of the landscape is changed. Turf grass is a notorious consumer of fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides, all of them inimical to wildlife and ultimately to us. The residues find their way into our wells and the run off ends up ultimately in the Russian River. (Is the Sonoma County golfing community ready for a non-irrigated course? - one wonders.)

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All of these factors suggest that it is possible to oppose the idea of another golf course as the entryway to Bennett Valley, even without the proposed housing development. When you leave the environs of Santa Rosa at Yulupa and Bennett Valley Road you have a clear sense of leaving the city behind you and entering the country. This is what good city/rural planning is all about. Both the Sonoma County and Santa Rosa General Plans insist that the ultimate urban boundary is at the southern edge of Galvin Park. What this development will do is blur the edge, making it more difficult to resist the next proposed "improvement" and thereby lead inexorably to the suburbanization of the Valley. In its charter statement, your Homeowners Association is charged with the preservation of the rural character of Bennett Valley and is therefore, on this basic principle, opposed to this project.

What You Can Do:

The BVHA Board represents you, and in order to accurately reflect your voice, we need to know how you feel on this issue. The Board considers this to be a watershed moment in the future of the Valley when we either take a stand for our choice of a rural environment and a country way of life, or we begin the slow absorption into the suburban tide of Santa Rosa.



Help us take this stand by following the suggestions stated in the Memo From the Board on page 3.

Michael Bates

Short Course on Certificates of Compliance

Recently the County Planning Department denied an Administrative Certificate of Compliance requesting that a 227 acre parcel be split into three parcels: two 40-acre parcels and one 190-acre parcel. Under the current general plan land use designation, the area lies in a Resources and Rural Development category zones at 160 acres per unit. The applicant has appealed their decision to the Planning Commission.

Now, dividing one large parcel into three may not seem like a major threat. However, the process in which this parcel or any other parcel may be granted a Certificate of Compliance uncovers a potential threat to our current planning regulations and their authority.

What is a *Certificate of Compliance*? Prior to current subdivision and zoning laws, property owners created parcels indiscriminately. Our current laws addressed this unstructured method and established uniformity in the planning process. However, here's the glitch: those parcels created prior to current laws can apply for a Certificate of Compliance under the Map Act of 1893. If a property owner can show that in some manner he configured his land into a parcel as way back as 1893, his parcel could supersede the current zoning.

Now, this is a simplified explanation. There are several variables to this planning tool that need to be researched. However, it brings up a simple question that should be answered: Can our current subdivision or zoning laws become null and void, allowing a property owner to build contrary to current zoning? Taking this to the application at hand, if the Board of Supervisors

approves the applicant's appeal and allows two 40 acre parcels and one 190 acre parcel, will the applicant be able to build on the two 40-acre parcels. I would assume this is his intention. If he does, it reverses the current zoning of one unit per 160 acres.

If this is true, what are the ramifications for the entire county? I am told there are approximately 10-20,000 assessor parcels in the county which could fall in the Certificate of Compliance category. If the Certificate of Compliance can supersede current zoning laws, could the following hypothetical situation really happen. Let's say you live in an area zoned for 40-acres per unit. Your next door neighbor happens to own a 80-acre parcel. By current zoning he could subdivide his land and build one more unit. No threat. However, what if he is able to show that in 1894 his great grandfather really created 80 separate one-acre parcels within this one parcel. Could he apply for a Certificate of Compliance and develop 80 units? Frightening thought.

By Juliana Doms: reprinted with permission from the E.I.R.. Juliana is the Publisher/Editor of the Sonoma County Environmental Impact Reporter. E.I.R. is a monthly county wide citizens newspaper which is factual and informative in reporting environmental concerns in the county. We encourage you to find out more about this excellent paper by calling 823-8744 for a sample copy and subscription information.

Future issues of E.I.R. will present actual examples of how Certificates of Compliance have undermined the normal planning process, and explain what you can do to help stop it.

MEMO FROM THE BOARD

We start the New Year facing many challenges, the most formidable of which is the city's intent upon expanding the Bennett Valley golf course with surrounding high density upscale homes. This has been a surreptitious back room scheme initiated by Santa Rosa City Manager Ken Blackman and Dennis Hunter, the developer who owns the land. The B.V. Board and Concerned Citizens for Santa Rosa have organized a Golf Course Ad Hoc committee with the intent of doing research, talking with City Council members, etc. in order to become a knowledgeable, visible force.

We learned, too late, a valuable lesson on the Water Transmission Line Project (details in the July 1992 Voice) Those monstrous 16 inch turquoise blue pipes stacked up on Bennett Valley Rd., awaiting the tear-up and traffic turmoil of being laid to rest, serve as a daily reminder that "the city does as the city wants." We were notified of this Project long after it had become a fait accompli, and our letters of protest and alternative suggestions were summarily ignored. Because alternative routing within the urban boundaries was never considered, and because a 16 inch pipeline is overkill (a 12 inch line would have been sufficient for the alleged water pressure needed for fire protection) we believe that the driving force behind this \$800,000 project was to provide access water for annexed extensive developments surrounding the proposed Golf Course. It doesn't take an advanced degree to figure out how the players will benefit.

City Hall conjures up pictures of a **huge Dragon** poised at the edge of the urban boundary to stealthily slither down Bennett Valley Rd. devouring up the scenic beauty that is a daily source of renewal for its residents and weary commuters. This is the Dragon that still foolishly is under the illusion that uncontrolled growth has no costs and that land, because it is there, must be annexed and developed. Your Board is committed to the role of St. George who will ensure enforcement of the Bennett Valley Specific Plan by being very vigilant of the Dragon's maneuvers. We need to know if we have your support behind us.

Please renew or become a BVHA member. We need your participation. The more members we have, the stronger our voice. We need the availability of land use expertise and legal consultation.

Thanks to all of you for your continuing support and confidence in us!

BVHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lois Brown	President
Tamara Boultsbee	Vice-President
Nancy Batson	Secretary
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Philip Sevier	Dave Steiner
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The Board meets the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 7:30 at the B.V. Fire Station. We invite your attendance and participation. A phone message can be left for the Bennett Valley Homeowners Assoc. at 528-9645 or write to: P. O. Box 2666, Santa Rosa, CA 95405.

We welcome two new members to the Board, Geoff Hornsby and Phil Sevier. Both men are long time residents of the Valley and have an interest in preserving its rural character. Phil is owner of the travel agency, Treasure Tours, and Geoff is a partner in the real estate appraisal firm of Crocker and Hornsby.

We reluctantly say farewell to Board members Kevin McCarthy and Kate Ecker. Kate's dynamic energies are now being divided between the Bennett Valley Education Foundation and her new adorable twins. Kevin, who so conscientiously served as president for the past two years, has been undergoing aggressive medical treatment for brain cancer. He reports that his doctors are encouraged with his "forward progress". He knows that our love and prayers are with Sally and him during this very difficult time.



We encourage you to:

- Participate in the survey on the enclosed membership form.
- Give us your opinions and any suggestions for strategies.
- Join our Golf Course Committee (call our Hot-Line #: 528-9645).
- Write or call City Council Members and Supervisor Mike Cale. Ask for more definitive information and share your opinions.
- Write letters to the Press Democrat stating your concerns regarding this project.
- Have discussions with your neighbors.

New Golf Course with
high density housing in
Bennett Valley?

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SANTA ROSA, CA
PERMIT NO. 945

BENNETT
VALLEY
VOICE



BENNETT VALLEY
HOMEOWNERS ASSOC.
P. O. Box 2666
Santa Rosa, CA 95405

SONOMA LAND TRUST



The Sonoma Land Trust, whose purpose is "to protect the land forever" will give a presentation at our Board meeting on March 17th, 7:30 p.m. at the BV Fire Station. Dan Shurman, executive director, will meet with us to show a short video and answer any of our questions. You are invited to join us in this opportunity to learn more about the Land Trust and how it could have a very positive impact upon our Valley.

**March 17th. 7:30 p.m.
Bennett Valley Fire Station**