

BENNETT VALLEY VOICE



BENNETT VALLEY HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATION
VOLUME 20, NO 2 JUNE, 1997

THE BRIDGE

Since 1995, when it was announced that the bridge crossing Matanzas Creek on Grange Road would be replaced, the project has been scrutinized by Bennett Valley residents concerned *how* this would be done. This article will attempt to give readers pertinent background information, and bring the project up to date.

The flood in the Winter of 1995 irrevocably damaged the bridge. Erosion had undermined the bridge foundations causing uneven settlement and displacement of the piers and deck. In addition, the bridge railings were deteriorating, and the middle of the bridge was beginning to separate. In the Spring of 1995, plans for a new bridge were announced by the county. These plans called for a bridge to be built to Federal Specifications with some exceptions. The bridge was to be built to the west of the present one. The roadbed was to be raised a minimum of approximately 11 feet so that no lights would be required.

On May 8, 1996, the Sonoma County Department of Transportation and Public Works held a public information meeting at the Grange Hall. The county staff presented different alternatives for construction of the bridge. These alternatives were discussed with the community, and Bennett Valley residents gave their opinions and voiced their concerns about the project. Approximately 75 people attended the meeting. Supervisor Mike Cale was also present.

Susan Klassen, at that time the engineer in charge of the bridge construction, answered that this is a local

issue not a Federal one. In other words, even though there are Federal guidelines for the project, these guidelines are not rigid. When an informal poll was conducted of the audience, the majority by far preferred a two-lane road.

The other major concern of residents was the aesthetics of the bridge. Residents voiced their concern that the new bridge have a rural character and fit in with the scenic beauty of the valley.

In the Fall of 1996, John Maitland had replaced Susan Klassen as the new engineer on the project, and the county was conducting a traffic study to determine if there was a need for a left turn lane. A structural engineer had been hired by the county to begin the design.

On Wednesday, November 13, representatives from the Bennett Valley Homeowners Board and the Bennett Valley Design Review Committee met with the staff of the County Public Works Department and with Supervisor Cale. There was a review of the proposed plans for replacing and widening the Bridge and the approaches from both Bennett Valley Road and lower Grange Road. The primary point of discussion was the width of the proposed bridge.

After this meeting, it was felt an Open House should be held whereby residents could review the different proposals, meet the county staff, and again voice their opinions. Markers would also be erected along the bridge area to indicate the different widths, and to show the bridge bed height to help residents

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visualize the proposal.

This Open House was held in November, 1996. An informal questionnaire was taken and showed overwhelmingly that residents were two to one in favor of having only a two lane bridge. *It became very apparent that there was opposition in the Valley to any material increase in size of the structure or increase in the number of lanes.*

Spring of this year brought further developments. In March, 1997, a grassroots organization formed to oppose building a new bridge at all. Other residents contacted the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission inquiring if the Bridge could be designated as a historical landmark. The County was preparing a report to determine whether a full EIR needed to be done. This report was to be completed by the end of May. And finally, there was concern among some county officials that the Open House questionnaire didn't give an accurate representation of Valley sentiment concerning the bridge.

That brings us up to the present and the question where are we now? First, there is still a debate whether a three lane bridge is necessary in order to meet safety standards set forth by Federal guidelines. There is conflicting information about this point. Second, in July there will be an Environment Review Committee public hearing.

The BVHA Board will be keeping abreast of the situation, and we will keep you informed!

The Grange Road Bridge looking toward Bennett Valley Road. The Classic art-deco concrete railings can be seen.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Board meets the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM at the Bennett Valley Fire Station. We invite your attendance and participation.

BRIDGE TIDBITS

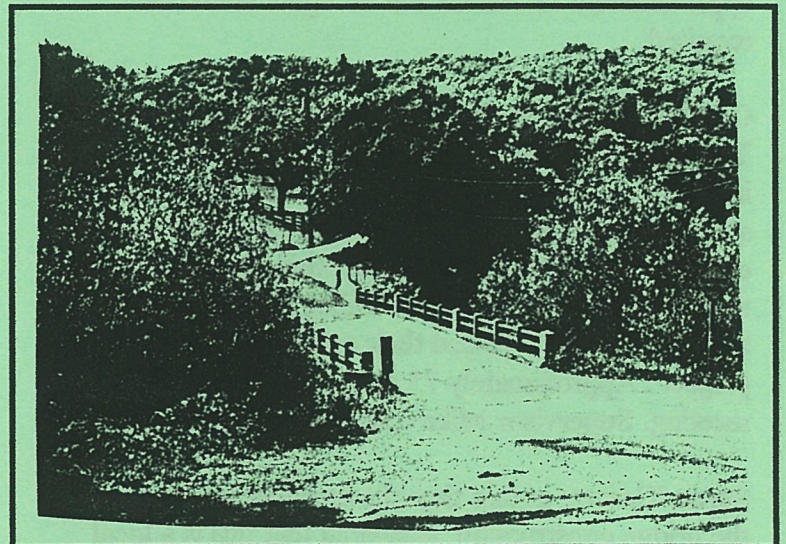
HISTORY- The Grange Road Bridge was built in 1924. The present bridge replaced another smaller wooden bridge. It was at this time that Bennett Valley Road was paved out to Grange Road.

LENGTH OF BRIDGE- The bridge is now 55 feet long. It would be 200 feet long.

WIDTH OF BRIDGE- The present bridge is 22 feet wide. The proposed new bridge would have lanes 12 feet wide, with 6 foot shoulders on each side. A two-lane bridge would be 36 feet wide, and a three-lane bridge 48 feet wide.

COST- Funding for the proposed bridge is 80% Federal bridge replacement funds and 20% County funds. The total cost is expected to be between \$1.2 million and \$1.8 million.

TRAFFIC- In the last daily traffic count, 1,400 cars per day used this intersection



A REMINDER FROM THE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Dear Bennett Valley Residents,

This letter is to serve as your annual reminder to take the necessary measures in protecting your home from wildfire.

California Health and Safety Code Section 13867 requires the removal of dry grass, stubble, brush, litter, rubbish, and other flammable materials that endanger public safety by creating a fire hazard.

In addition, and most important, is the need to maintain a defensible space around structures as outlined in Public Resources Code 4291. A minimum a 30 foot defensible space free from flammable vegetation and debris must be maintained around all structures. A 50-100 foot space may be required on the sides of structures with steep slopes and rugged terrain.

The Bennett Valley Fire Protection District, in coordination with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, will be conducting inspections as a part of our annual hazard reduction program.

If you have any questions on how to better protect your home from wildfire, feel free to call us at 578-7761, or stop by the fire station Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Simas
Fire Prevention Officer



FOURTH OF JULY SAFETY

We are again reminding residents in the Valley of the dangers that fireworks pose in a rural community such as ours.

NO FIREWORKS PLEASE!

PO COLLECTION BOX

In the last issue of the Voice, we reported that several residents inquired if it would be possible to have a Post Office Box installed in Bennett Valley. The U.S. Post Office is seriously considering putting a collection mail box in Bennett Valley for outgoing mail in response to requests from residents.

The Fire Station seemed the logical place to put the mailbox. However, the Post Office needs a paved area where cars can safely pull off the road. There is no such place at the Fire Station which would not interfere with their emergency activities. An area which is not too remote for residents to use is also a priority. This is where the matter stands at the present time. We will keep you *posted*.

COMMUNITY DAY

Mark Sunday, August 17 on your calendar. That is the day the annual Bennett Valley Community Day will take place. The event will be held on the winery grounds, and will run between 12 noon and 5 PM.

Community Day is the main fund raising event for our Fire Department . All proceeds are used for the purchase of life saving and fire fighting equipment to protect and serve the Bennett Valley community.

This is a popular event in Bennett Valley, and held in a beautiful setting. So bring your entire family, and have a good time!

BOARD OPENINGS

There are several Boards in Bennett Valley that need to be filled. The Homeowners' Association, the Bennett Valley Design Review Committee, and the Bennett Valley Fire Protection District all have openings for Directors.

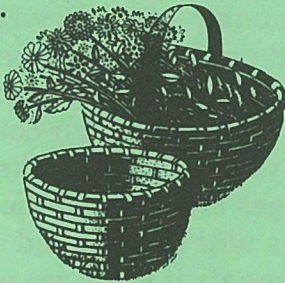
If you would like further information, call Bill Sullivan at 528-6804.

HUNTER PROPOSAL

Dennis Hunter has another proposal for Sonoma County. He has 32 acres with three parcels on one side of Bennett Valley Road, and another 80+ acres with seven parcels on the other side. Mr. Hunter would like to transfer his development rights from the larger acreage from the North side of Bennett Valley Road to the smaller acreage on the South side.

The lot is located at the entrance to Bennett Valley, and is in an area where the shift from urban to rural begins. Placing high density housing at the entrance to a scenic corridor is counter to the intent of the Bennett Valley Area Plan. Plus there may be a problem for Mr. Hunter to meet county requirements for wells and septic systems.

The BVHA does not see how this proposal which places high density housing in such a sensitive area falls within the guidelines of the Bennett Valley Area Plan or meets county regulations. The BVHA has given Supervisor Cale the above thoughts about this proposal.



DESIGN REVIEW WORKS!

“How has Bennett Valley managed to remain so beautifully rural while being so close to ‘civilization’?” “It (BV) looks relatively undeveloped, but at nighttime when you see lights twinkling, you realize there’s a lot more development than you see in the daytime.” “Rincon Valley used to look like Bennett Valley does today!”

These are just a sample of comments that we hear from people when they discover for the first time or re-visit periodically our special area. And the reality

is, preservation of what long time residents as well as newcomers prize so highly has not just happened accidentally. It’s a result of having a citizen supported Specific Plan (now Area Plan) with goals and policies that describe how and where development is to take place ... and how we, as a community, can preserve the beauty and rural quality of the area. Within this plan is a Design Review Element which provides direction to preserving and protecting the visual amenities of the area while accommodating the growth allowed under the adopted zoning and land use elements.

What is Design Review? The Design Review Committee is an advisory body comprised of seven members of the community, appointed by the Board of Supervisors, entrusted to apply the standards established to meet the intent spelled out in the Plan. As a group, the members volunteer their time to apply the standards fairly, and work closely with the public to help meet the goals of the individual as well as the community. In addition, the Committee strives to educate residents on how to maintain the rural ambiance on existing structures and parcels - by using color and materials to blend in with the natural surrounding on the individual parcel - and through encouraging residents to consider the visual impact whenever making any changes in the natural landscape. By all working together, we can continue to maintain the natural beauty of our area and the quality of our living environment.

When would I as a property owner need to meet with Design Review? In essence, the county refers plans for all new structures or additions to structures; modifications to the exterior of existing structures such as siding, windows, roofs, etc., as well as siting and design of all new projects. (If you are thing about making any changes , or just want o know more about the process, call a committee member or come by a meeting.)

Yes, having Design Review does take a bit of time, initially, but it doesn’t have to add any time to a project. In fact, it can save time if started early in a project. Those who have been around for a while will tell you *that Design Review works*, (yes, even those who haven’t initially supported the concept) and those who move to the area, seem to appreciate the end result. Let’s keep it working!

THE SONOMA COUNTY BIKEWAYS PLAN

What is the Bikeways Plan and where did it come from? In 1993, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution which established a 5-member bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee. The committee's task was to develop a comprehensive bikeways plan in the unincorporated portions of Sonoma County, and to integrate it with the Bikeways Plans of all nine cities in the County. This would make the County eligible for state and federal transportation funds. Projects would be prioritized and there would be a framework for the allocation of funds.

The committee worked with the Sonoma County Transit staff to develop the draft Bikeways Plan which includes a proposed bikeways network and goals, objectives, policies and priorities. The draft Bikeways Plan retains most of the existing 270-mile bikeway network designated in the General Plan, and adds 137 miles of proposed additional routes, for a total network of about 407 miles. There would be Class I bike paths (separated from the roadway), Class II bike lanes (striped and signed lanes next to the roadway), and Class III bike routes (signed but not separate bike lanes and are part of the roadway). The total estimated cost is \$21,049,200.00.

In 1995, the Committee held a series of six noticed public workshops at various locations around the county to elicit public input on the bikeways proposal. The BVHA feels that this notification process was completely inadequate! We have in Bennett Valley two officially recognized County referral groups; yet neither was notified or solicited for input during the planning/writing process.

On March 25, the Bikeways Plan came up before the Board of Supervisors for approval.

At that meeting the BVHA stated their opposition to any of the roads in the Bennett Valley area being designated as bike routes. We gave the following reasons:

1. There was improper public input from the people this plan will directly affect. 2. There was only superficial thought given to the environmental impact. 3. Wider roads would mean adding "Future Shoulders". What does this mean to an area such as Bennett Valley? 4. There would be increased traffic. 5. There are hidden costs involved other than the amount given above. 6. The roads here are unsafe for bicyclists. 7. And finally, the Bikeways plan is in conflict with the BV Area Plan.

At this meeting, Supervisor Cale made a motion that all Bennett Valley Roads be classified as Class III and Priority 3 roads. This was passed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors. What does this classification mean? Priority categories indicate desired timelines for completion. Priority 3 projects are identified primarily as recreational in purpose, and are third in line for completion. That puts their completion at least at 20+ years. Class III bikeways mean that no changes are made to the roadway. Caution signs will be installed along roadway segments if there are no roadway shoulders, high average daily traffic volumes, and no safe alternative route for bicyclists in the immediate area.

We hope this article has given VOICE readers valuable information on the draft Bikeways Plan, and brought them up to date as to how this plan will affect our community.



BENNETT VALLEY COMMUNITY DAY
SUNDAY, AUGUST 17, 1997
12:00 TO 5:00 PM
MATANZAS CREEK WINERY



**BENNETT
VALLEY
VOICE**

BENNETT VALLEY
HOMEOWNERS ASSOC.
P. O. Box 2886
Santa Rosa, CA 95405

**BULK RATE
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