

MOUNTAIN CEMETERY OPEN SPACE OR RESORT HOTEL?

by Joseph L. Costello

I wish to clearly state that the current Voter Initiative addressing a commercial development above Mountain Cemetery was born out of genuine concern for the people's right to know and for the process involved in considering the use of public property. Its focus is to provide a vehicle that enables the voters to decide this momentous issue. It is not an indictment of Rosewood Hotels and Resorts and its investors. They were the catalysts but not the target. The views that follow are mine alone and not necessarily those of the other proponents.

Much has and will be said as to the impact of the proposed resort hotel on sixty acres of undeveloped land owned by the City. Important issues such as traffic flow, parking facilities, view obstruction, night lighting, noise pollution, water & sewer capacity, soil erosion & water runoff, plant & animal habitat, employment, retail sales, lease and tax revenue, and so on are all appropriate issues for discussion.

No doubt Rosewood and its investors would build a fine resort hotel on the site and attempt to mitigate as many concerns

as are reasonably possible. But in my view neither the potential impact of the development nor the reputation of Rosewood are the primary considerations.

The City has owned these sixty acres for over a hundred years. It is the last large tract of undeveloped property owned by the City. Such properties are not renewable. Once developed as a resort hotel, its value as open space would be lost forever.

Councilman Ken Brown has described the site as a "fabulous resource within walking distance of the Plaza". If developed as a public park or left as a natural preserve, it has the potential of being one of the finest municipally owned open spaces in the North Bay. Roads and trails already exist, as do clearings for picnics and quarries for historical interest. The views are magnificent. After some initial cleanup and capital improvements such as tables and sanitary facilities, it might be made accessible to the general public in a relatively short time. Expertise such as the California Department of Parks & Recreation and the Bartholomew Foundation is locally available.

Would the revenue from Rosewood solve the City's perceived problems and provide enough funds for acquiring open space from adjoining property owners? The California Lottery was supposed to solve the problems of our public schools. It did not, as no amount of money seems enough for bureaucracy. Even assuming the availability of funds, how much incentive would remain for adjoining property owners to sell their land for open space? Rather than encouraging commercial development such as a resort hotel, the City should set the example for others by preserving its own open space.

Fifty or a hundred years from now, there will be a lot more people in this valley and a lot less undeveloped land. The Plaza and Depot Park will no longer accommodate the recreational needs of the public. Where will future generations go to relax and enjoy a natural environment? The answer can be found among the sixty acres of undeveloped land behind Mountain Cemetery. Let us have foresight now and resist those who seek instant gratification by gambling the future.

SONOMA VALLEY VOICE

Publisher: Will Shonbrun

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Production: Dave Shafran

Valley Voice is published quarterly by a collective of like-minded community activists. News stories, opinion pieces, questions and letters are welcome. Subscriptions are \$10 per year to cover publishing and distribution.

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Printed on 100% recycled (50% post-consumer), de-inked paper

SEARS POINT EXPANSION: SETTING LIMITS

by Marvin L. Krasnansky

If Sonoma County is planning to impose limits on the size and frequency of events at wineries, the same standards should be applicable to Sears Point Raceway.

That is the thrust of the message delivered to the Sonoma County Planning Commission by the Sears Point Yellow

Flag Alliance. The Planning Commission currently is reviewing the Draft Amended Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) follow-

ing a public hearing. The final version of the DEIR is expected to be issued in October, followed by additional public comment and action by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

The failure of the DEIR to consider limits on the size and frequency of events as a traffic mitigation is striking in light of SPR President Steve Page's response to a

question at the Sonoma Valley Citizens Advisory Commission hearing on the document. Page conceded, "We are willing to live with limits on the size and frequency of events in the new Use Permit."

However, when the issue was raised at the Planning Commission, Page remained silent on the subject.

We are willing to live with limits on the size and frequency of events in the new Use Permit.
SPR President Steve Page

Strangely, neither the Sonoma Index-Tribune nor the Santa Rosa Press Democrat reported Page's concession. In

calling for the limits, the Yellowflag Alliance also recommended that financial penalties be imposed should the limits be exceeded.

(For the full text of statements on the DEIR by the Yellow Flag Alliance and the Citizens Advisory Commission, please go to: www.yellowflag.org)

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