

REBUTTAL TO COMMENTARY REGARDING HUNTER HOUSING PROJECT

(In The Star on 10/3/13: Guest Commentary: Why the Hunter project is bad for St. Helena is in parentheses below each point)

Point 1: Affordable housing. The City does indeed have the legal power to assure that the affordable units are built, just as it did at Magnolia Oaks. The City will not issue an occupancy unit for the market rate units unless and until the affordable units are ready to go. As to the zoning law issue, the author's position was rejected by the City Attorney. The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) on the Hunter proposal on pages 11-12 ("Master Response # 2 - Land Use and Zoning Conformance" reflects the legal view of the City Attorney. This essay asserts that the only reason that the developer includes the affordable units is to gain concessions from the City but our inclusionary housing ordinance requires the developer to include them.

(Affordable housing — The project application promises to build 25 affordable units in the "future," in the form of deed-restricted apartments. There are several problems here; once the out-of-town developer cashes out on the project when building permits are issued, it could be difficult getting this money-losing, potential "future" affordable housing built. The only reason the developer includes these promissory units is to force the city to provide concessions on water use, building setbacks, development fees, etc. The other problem is that the proposed development as described in the Draft Environmental Impact Report violates our city zoning laws. Because these units will be state regulated, we cannot guarantee that they will be available for the intended target of workforce housing. That about wraps up the pros.)

Point 2: Public Safety. According to the FEIR, the author's position is not true and, further, he is not a trained geologist or hydrologist, nor has he indicated that he has any professional experience with levees or flooding or building. His opinion is just that -- an un-informed opinion. The bond committee overseeing Measure A has not ever considered any aspect of the flood control project to be a misuse of Measure A funds.

(Public safety — Much of the construction will be in the former flood plain that is now protected by our privately designed, privately built, taxpayer funded levee. When the levee was designed, it was intended to protect Vineyard Valley and the Hunts Grove Apartments. By some odd coincidence, the boundary of the levee was expanded to border the entire parcel owned by the developer (that is another story worth investigating, i.e. misuse of Measure A funds). It is foolish to build homes behind a levee. Levees fail. When the city chose to privately design and build the levee as opposed to using Army Corps of Engineers, it assumed liability for damage caused by a levee failure. This land now serves as a soak site to absorb rainwater and spillover from the Napa River. When the whole area is paved over for homes and streets, where will the water go? How will the new drainage pattern affect other homes and neighborhoods currently not impacted by flooding? If this were the only con, that alone should sink the project.)

Point 3: Traffic. Based on the FEIR, his claim of a significant impact at Pope Street/Silverado Trail is true and alternatives to the small Pope St. bridge have been discussed at length in St. Helena. Nonetheless, based on the Draft EIR, there is no indication that suddenly 10,000 people would appear in St. Helena. This is a scare tactic.

(Traffic — This development will have a negative impact on two already poorly rated and congested intersections, Adams/Main and Pope Street/Silverado Trail. These and the surrounding streets will be impacted by the 450 new residents as well as new traffic as drivers discover the new "cut-throughs." The project EIR even admits that traffic is a significant impact that cannot be mitigated. When this land was designated as medium-density housing, it was in a time when the vision for St. Helena included 8,000 to 10,000 residents (we now have around 5,800, and that number shrunk over the last census period). I won't waste words describing what St. Helena would be like with 10,000 residents. This vision also included now largely unpopular street extensions, all centered on an Adams extension to the Silverado Trail. That extension

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and others will not be on the 2030 General Plan. If any homes are built in that area, it should only be after Adams is connected to the trail.)

Point 4: Loss of open space/view. The City zoned this property Medium Density Residential a generation ago and in doing so, it accepted the loss of view in development of the site. The author fails to come to grips with the likelihood that if Hunter is removed as an affordable site, there will be extreme pressure from California State Housing and Community Development Department to find undeveloped land outside our internal urban limit line to designate for development -- with loss of open space and perhaps views there. there is no free lunch.

(Loss of open space/view sheds — This land is now one of the best view sheds in St. Helena, and the only one on the east side of town. This area is used by many residents for walking and hiking and could serve as an avenue for the bike trail. The vineyards now on the property would be destroyed and the neighboring vineyards would be negatively impacted. Plant and animal life including fish would all be negatively impacted by the loss of this precious open space.)

Point 5: Water. The developer does assert that the project's potable water use will be water neutral. To be sure of that, the developer will be required to demonstrate that for each lot when it seeks a use permit. There are a number of ways to offset water usage besides toilet replacement (for instance, low wash dishwashers in restaurants). The key point is that the developer will be required to show water neutrality -- it can only receive a use permit allowing development on a lot where such neutrality has been required.

(Water — The developer estimates the project will require nearly 4 million gallons of city water per year. The project is required to be water neutral. They claim this will be accomplished by installing low-flush toilets around town. My own quick estimates suggest this will require 821 toilets. Most people who want low-flush toilets will install them anyway to save money, so I cannot conceive as to where all these toilets will come from. If the project is approved and built, it will be the city's problem when we can't flush our way to neutrality. But that's not all. The project will also require a staggering 8 million gallons a year of groundwater for non-potable use. This will all come from the aquifer near the river. Not good any way you look at it. That's almost 20 percent of the city's total safe yield of groundwater.)

Bottom Line: The author ignores St. Helena's **unbuilt** State housing allocation (our obligation) in our current Housing Element 5-year cycle. He fails to explain how we are going to build the affordable units of our housing requirement in the next cycle without developer support -- the City certainly doesn't have the money to do that.

Reality: The author lives on Starr Avenue and he is merely defending his view and his personal wish list. He is also defending the official position of SHRFRG (St. Helena Residents for Responsible Growth, a group he formed with other view-mates to oppose affordable housing near them.)

We have hundreds of people working in St. Helena to keep this town running, to educate our children, to keep our businesses bringing in income and it is morally right to make sure that many of our employees can live here with their families. They have invested with us and we profit -- they deserve to have us invest in them.