



County of Santa Cruz

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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AGENDA: 10/28/08

October 23, 2008

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: PAR 3 PROPERTY

Dear Members of the Board:

Located in the heart of Santa Cruz County are two parcels of land which have come to be known throughout the county as the "Par 3 Property." Many see the property every day - it's the vacant land next to Highway 1 just north of State Park Drive. The two parcels together are approximately 13 acres and for many, many years were the location of the Par 3 Golf Course, a course which catered to beginning golfers, children and seniors.

The Par 3 course was built and opened for business in 1962. Many of us have fond memories of learning (or trying to learn!) the basics of the game of golf from parents, grandparents and friends on the Par 3 course. It was a low key, inexpensive way for families to have fun together.

In 1999, after 37 years of serving the public, the property owner forced the closure of the Par 3 Golf Course in order to change this recreational land to housing. Since residential land can be sold for more than park land, the presumed motive was to increase the sales price of the property and the profit to the owner. However, the zoning of the property is "PR" (Parks and Recreation) and the County General Plan designation is "O-R" (Parks and Recreation), so any residential project would require an amendment of the County's General Plan and a re-zoning of the property.

Over the course of the last eight or nine years, several developers have made proposals to the County for development of housing on the property. Most recently, the County Planning

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Department was evaluating a development proposal for 230 homes on the property by Standard Pacific Homes. For a variety of reasons, none of these proposals has progressed to the point of approval or disapproval by the County. However, these developers were responding to the stated desire by some in the county to grow faster and increase our housing stock.

In the past some housing advocacy groups have promoted this property as a suitable location for high density housing, and at one time there was a serious lack of affordable housing in the area. Fortunately, that is no longer the case. The housing opportunities in the Seacliff area around State Park Drive and Soquel Drive have changed markedly over the last few years. Where there was once little affordable housing, there is now a great deal either built or planned. In fact, 11 acres of new affordable housing will be located within a quarter of a mile of the Par 3 property!

These properties are either 100% affordable South County Housing developments or are properties identified to be rezoned under the County's Housing Element program. Those properties are:

- Seacliff Highlands on Canterbury Drive, which is 3 acres of 100% affordable housing
- South County Housing's new 100% affordable ownership project, located on nearly 2 acres at Searidge and Canterbury
- The Miller property across Soquel Drive from Safeway, which consists of 2 acres being re-zoned under the Housing Element program
- The Poor Clares property across Highway 1 from Safeway, which includes 4 acres being rezoned under the Housing Element program

In addition to these 11 acres of new affordable housing, there are five mobile home parks within that same quarter mile of the Par 3 property. Two (Palm Terrace and Seacliff Mobile Home Park) are immediately adjacent to the Par 3 property. The other three nearby mobile home parks are Blue Pacific, Seacliff Trailer Park and Oceanview. These five mobile home parks provide affordable housing for hundreds of people, largely families and seniors.

The Aptos community has recognized and responded to the need for housing and they have done so with good grace and little "NIMBYism" ("not in my backyard"). The community has shown a willingness to help make projects successful and I am proud of the community's record of support for affordable housing. While

the community has supported a great deal of new affordable housing, it is completely opposed to building housing on the Par 3 land.

With 11 new acres of affordable housing, and relatively dense existing housing, this small area around State Park Drive and Soquel Drive has reached its limit. With the currently planned projects, the carrying capacity of this neighborhood has been reached. For example, the traffic intersections serving the area operate at near capacity now and will be even more impacted as the re-zoned land is built out. The local sewer system is also nearing its limit unless an enormous investment is made to enlarge its capacity.

Two years ago, the Par 3 property was being considered for re-zoning under the County's Housing Element program. The Board removed the property from consideration for two years and the community undertook an effort to raise the money to purchase the Par 3 property and maintain it as a recreational asset for the entire county. That fund raising effort has not been successful largely because of the uncertainty surrounding the property. While this issue was not scheduled to come back to the Board for three more months, the situation is not going to change in those months and there is no reason to delay longer.

While it is not our intent to preclude or prejudge any future attempt to amend the land use designations currently applied to this property, it is appropriate to engage in an examination of the community's interest in maintaining the current designations.

In addition, developers continue to propose housing developments for this property. In fact, one such developer is in the early stages of preparing a proposal for a housing development of more than 240 units to go on the Par 3 property.

Equally important is the fact that the County has finally met the requirements of the State's Housing and Community Development (HCD) Department. For many years, the County struggled to meet the State's requirements for affordable housing, but Santa Cruz County now has a certified Housing Element. Assuming that the identified properties are re-zoned as proposed, it appears that the County will not have to re-zone any more land to satisfy HCD, even in the next planning cycle. Therefore, one of the primary reasons to consider re-zoning the Par 3 property is gone. We are free to do what we think is best for the community.

Santa Cruz County prides itself on creating liveable communities for people of all ranges of income. Housing in our community is becoming more dense due to State mandates, economic realities, and efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. As a result, open space and park land become all the more valuable to the community.

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Housing is important, and affordable housing is critically important. But new housing is not the only need in our community. Preserving open space and recreational land is essential for the long term livability and quality of life in Santa Cruz County.

Just as the City of Santa Cruz wouldn't put housing on Lighthouse Field, Capitola wouldn't consider such a change for Jade Street Park and Watsonville values Ramsey Park, so the County must have the vision to preserve a property that has served the recreational needs of the community for many years.

I therefore recommend that the Board of Supervisors take the following actions:

1. Hold a public meeting to consider the current and future use of the Par 3 property; and
2. Acknowledge that the current zoning and general plan designations of the Par 3 property are appropriate.

Very truly yours,



ELLEN PIRIE, Supervisor
Second District

EP:ted

cc: Planning Department

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