

November 22, 2011

Mayor Kellner and Councilmembers  
City of Novato  
75 Rowland Way  
Novato, CA 94945



**Re: Hanna Ranch Master Plan, Precise Development Plan, Waiver of Easements, etc.**

Dear Mayor Kellner and Councilmembers:

The Marin Conservation League appreciates the opportunity to comment on the merits of the Hanna Ranch project as mitigated in the FEIR and Conditions of Approval of the Precise Development Plan.

There are 15 exceptions to the Development Standards and 88 Conditions of Approval which indicate that this project is difficult to achieve on the property. Other exceptions were not included due to interpretation of the "top of bank" definition.

Although the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the site is .4, the project claims a much lower FAR presumably based on the gross acreage of the property. The FAR should be based on the net acreage reducing the gross acreage by constraints on the site, such as steep slopes, a pond and wetland setbacks. **This net FAR should be part of an approval and remain a consistent element of any approved plan.**

The width of the road through the development is inadequate for safety. The environmentally superior alternative to the project eliminates one building on the panhandle and removes all development from the 50 foot wetland buffer. This would allow a **standard width public road to be constructed through the project** which could accommodate a Class 2 bicycle lane, eliminating the need for either Option A or Option B. Option A requires severe grading and encroaches on the setback for the Beverly Ehreth Ecological Preserve. Option B requires an excessively high retaining wall, as well as severe grading immediately adjacent to the small pond. **We recommend the Reduced Project Alternative.**

The floating easement must not be vacated. It was created in recognition of the Vintage Oaks traffic demand, which is exacerbated by this project. Public safety is at stake, which is acknowledged by the emergency access linking the McPhail site. At some point in time it may be possible to link the road to the Highway 37 interchange. Therefore the floating easement should be protected.

The setback from the wetlands is not properly calculated. The EIR claims that the "top of

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bank” is at the waterline of the two ponds. The Marin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (MCFC&WCD) disputes that definition and so do we. **Development should be set back 50 feet from where the slope of the bank flattens to horizontal.** The Reduced Project Alternative (RPA) acknowledges this appropriate setback in the description of the RPA.

We also agree with the MCFC&WCD on the wildlife corridor proposed between the two ponds. **Daylighting the existing culvert and planting riparian vegetation** would create a much better wildlife corridor than adding a second culvert. It could also provide mitigation for the small seasonal wetlands to be destroyed. It would necessitate building a bridge over the creek, but the maintenance would be much easier to accomplish. We do not support off-site mitigation.

The hotel is proposed to be three to four stories high, but also has a tower associated with it that would project well above the building, exceeding the city height limits and ridgeline construction limits. **The hotel should stay within standard height limits.** The hotel should **incorporate energy conserving features** as well as provide rooftop energy for the building. **Water-conserving bathroom fixtures, recycled landscape irrigation water and purple piping should be incorporated into the hotel.** We also recommend providing at least **one electric car charging station for guests.** This would be an incentive for people with electric cars to use this hotel.

It has been proposed that the site should include a housing component. We do not support adding housing to the project because of its isolation and the noise impacts associated with its location. We do, however, **recommend that Novato adopt a linkage fee for commercial development** that would help Novato address the housing demand created by developments such as this that have many low wage jobs. Condition #85 states that, “Prior to final occupancy, the project sponsor shall pay development impact fees pursuant to the resolutions adopted by the City Council in effect at the time building permits are issued.” We urge the Council to adopt the model ordinance similar to the county and San Rafael.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours truly,



Susan Stompe  
President