

## Rival groups back compromise on St. Vincent/Silveira site

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Marin Independent Journal

Article Launched: 10/17/2007 12:08:53 AM PDT

Environmental leaders and housing advocates stood together Tuesday in support of a compromise plan that could lead to the construction a large senior village on ranchland at the north end of San Rafael.

After a six-hour hearing, county supervisors unanimously endorsed plans that would set a traffic-based development cap for the 1,110 acres owned by St. Vincent's School for Boys and Silveira Ranch.

Supervisor Susan Adams, a staunch critic of previous development plans for the acreage, supported the compromise. She said it sets the stage for "an Italian style kind of thing rather than a Southern California kind of sprawl across the hills."

For the second time in less than a month, more than 500 people attended the county hearing on new long-term growth guidelines for Marin's unincorporated areas.

Supervisors endorsed the controversial 221-home cap on the future development of the two properties. But they also opened the door for building a large senior village, much larger than 221 units, as long as it wouldn't exceed the commute-hour traffic generated by a conventional single-family home development.

That compromise pleased environmentalists and local housing advocates - for the time being.

Two prominent environmental leaders - Marge Macris of Campaign for Marin and Barbara Salzman of the Marin Audubon Society - stood when St. Vincent's spokesman Gary Giacomini asked backers of the compromise to rise.

The Silveira family, who run a dairy ranch on the adjacent 340 acres, objected to the cap, claiming it unfairly erodes the potential value of their property.

"The harm to the Silveira family has already been done," said the family's attorney, David Trotter of Walnut Creek.

Giacomini, a former county supervisor, said the compromise provides St. Vincent's, which owns 770 acres, fair parameters to build a large senior village, to achieve the economic return it needs to support its programs caring for troubled boys and protecting local environmental assets on the property.

"It's a fairly momentous occasion," Alex Hinds, the county's community development director, said of the compromise.

"I think we've achieved something pretty remarkable," said Supervisor Charles McGlashan.

Supervisors on Tuesday morning spent two hours behind closed doors working with their lawyers on the language of the compromise.

Cliff Meneken of Terra Linda, who opposes any development on the two properties, called the compromise "a

last-minute backroom steal."

St. Vincent's said it will submit a development plan for county approval within a year.

The board last month endorsed language that designated the site for 221 homes in addition to a senior village similar in size and scope of the 340-unit Redwoods in Mill Valley. The St. Vincent's plan could still attain those numbers, but the size of the development would be limited by the number of commute-hour car trips it would generate.

Supervisors are scheduled to approve the new countywide plan at a public hearing on Nov. 6.

The senior village outlined by St. Vincent's would include high-end homes for seniors, affordable apartments and townhomes for seniors and workers, assisted-living units and nursing-care beds. About 30 percent of the units would be affordable, meeting local housing advocates' pleas that the St. Vincent's-Silveira lands be used to help meet Marin's growing need for affordable senior housing.

"We can get everything we want," Giacomini said. "It turns on peak-hour traffic. We can make it so there's no peak-hour traffic. The wheel that turns it is traffic impacts."

The plan limits development to only 5 percent of St. Vincent's undeveloped land - or roughly 30 to 40 acres.

Supervisors last month endorsed establishing a "Baylands Corridor" zoning designation that holds future development of the two parcels to a minimum to protect the habitat the land affords.

The historic school buildings and chapel at St. Vincent's would be preserved.

"I think everyone gave up something for this," Supervisor Judy Arnold said.

Environmentalists' support was not unconditional.

Both Macris and Salzman said how long it last depends on the size of the plan that St. Vincent's submits.

"We certainly will be following any development plans that come in for that property," said Macris, a former county planning director.

"We are happy to have reached an agreement, a compromise," said Salzman, who has opposed other development plans for the two properties.

While the county supervisors have been struggling to balance meeting local housing needs with growing local traffic problems, they were scolded for not providing more housing in the plan.

Marin's housing problems will get worse, not better, because of development restrictions in the new plan, said Joseph Perkins, president of the Home Builders Association of Northern California. He said provisions for housing in the plan are "simply disingenuous, if not downright misleading."

But Meneken said there is strong local support to save the St. Vincent's and Silveira lands from any development.

Drawing boos and hisses from housing advocates and St. Vincent's supporters in the audience, Meneken said, "I urge you to consider the economic and environmental consequence of considering large development where traffic is already at a standstill."

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