

Sidetracks

Justice denied in housing vote

by John B. Burns

Though much of the articulate, heartfelt comment given during last week's public hearing on the Orchard Park project appeared to fall on deaf ears, the sheer number and passion of the speakers demonstrated that despite the council's unreasonnable rejection of the project, the community's concern over development of affordable housing is still very strong.

The pleas for social justice were as numerous as they were insightful, and came from all sides of the political and social spectrum. Here are just a few:

Don Schilling, local pastor and youth volunteer: "This project would make our community a little bit more inclusive, a little bit more beautifully human. When we pass up such opportunities, we diminish ourselves."

Tula Jaffe, homeless advocate: "We're saying that only the wealthy can live in our county. Your (council's) approval would be a real act to end this horrible classism, particularly in Sebastopol."

Jim Corey, local businessman and former chamber of commerce president: "Perhaps there should be a sign hung at the entrance to the city which says, 'Compassion Free Zone.' We are as we are perceived."

Terry Cox, a 13 year renter at the Village Park Trailer Park: "If you don't own a home, you dream of owning a home, of having a chance. You can't keep Sebastopol all to yourself, you've got to share some with your brothers and sisters."

Mitch Mulanix, representing Sebastopol's "20 somethings": "Almost all of the 20 somethings who grew up here have given up hope on being able to live here. I believe your reasons (for rejecting the project) are phony."

Yvonne Cornelius, Sebastopol native: "You've created an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness. I'm going to have to go home and tell my 14 year-old son he'll never be able to live here."

Mary Moore, social activist: "We need to see government working with low income people instead of against them to create a multi-cultural community. This (Sebastopol) is becoming an elitist, white yuppie enclave."

Chet Davis, Analy High School teacher living in Santa Rosa: "To help improve our schools, it's better if teachers can live in the community where they teach."

John Woolsey, a former Sebastopol resident: "The Gardeners are the kind of people who believe in giving people a leg up. Don't slam the door on these people."

Nick Stewart, former mayor: "The Gardeners have played by all the rules. They were told there were no doctrinaire reasons to oppose annexation. The city of Sebastopol has a general plan and unless the council makes a policy decision to establish a study district, it would seem that the basis of your (the council's) decision should be the existing general plan."

In sharp contrast to project advocates, several project opponents cited either selfish reasons or gave out misinformation in a sudden and surprisingly strong show of NIMBYISM. Some examples:

•Sierra Club President Don Frank mislabeled the property a "beautiful working apple orchard." It's not.

Helen Shane, the only city planning commissioner to vote against the project, stunned listeners by citing multiple listing figures in an failed attempt to prove that there's plenty of affordable housing in Sebastopol. (Her comments were reminiscent of newly elected President Ronald Reagan waving a handful of want ads while claiming there were plenty of jobs in the middle of the 1982 recession.)

Lamented a Mill Station Rd. man, "We would have to forgo our genteel country lifestyle" if the project is approved.

In a rare display of frankness, one Belmont Terrace resident concluded his remarks saying, "I suppose I could be labeled a NIMBY."

Unless the legal system provides relief from the unjust, impractical and counter-productive decision by the City Council, we'll probably never see the Gardeners' exemplary affordable housing project built.

But ample opportunities will arise in months to come over whether or not Sebastopol, as a community, will allow its elected officials to pay only lip service to the issue of affordable housing. Organizing on the grass roots level may be the key to at least getting their attention.