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COMMENTARY

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Golf course foes' bad manners

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Sonoma West

by Kathy Austin

I wish to address all the opponents of a golf course on Kelly Farm. Monday evening, April 27, I attended a meeting with Vice Mayor Bill Roventini, Santa Rosa Mayor Sharon Wright, Councilman Dave Berto, City Manager Ken Blackman, Marco Waaland (consultant), Chuck Rust (head of Santa Rosa Parks) and two members of the golf course search committee.

The meeting was heavily attended by members of the Laguna Foundation, Sebastopol Tomorrow and Sonoma County Conservation Coalition, as well as neighbors of the site and additional members of the golf course site committee.

The purpose of the meeting was to assess the feasibility of proceeding with considering Kelly Farm for a golf course. I came to ask specific questions of Marco Waaland, Mayor Wright, the golf course advocates and Ken Blackman so that I could make a knowledgeable decision as to the question of feasibility. My willingness to remain open minded and get answers to questions was widely misinterpreted as somehow supporting a golf course in the tradition of "you're either with us or against us." This attitude was unfortunately promulgated by this paper. It is wrong and I resent it.

The intolerance and close-mindedness that some environmentalists displayed was very disheartening. You know who you are. I compare you to extreme "right to lifers" who label anyone who is

"pro choice" as a murderer. They act the same way you do. If you feel you're right then to hell with fairness and openness and information.

They, like you, are not open to any discussion of the facts or circumstances. It is either right or wrong. How many of you are pro choice? Can't you see the irony? To the woman who ranted and raved over the phone to my 10-year-old son, you should be ashamed!

**My willingness to remain open minded and get answers to questions was widely misinterpreted as somehow supporting a golf course ...**

Though I was subjected to extreme pressure and accusations, I did not succumb to these tactics. I will never give up the tenets of what I consider essential to the public process: openness, fairness and a willingness to be informed and to get answers before making a decision. I hope that in the future you will remember this and not repeat the presumptions of the past.

Thank you to Kim Cordell who alone stood out and made eloquent and specific arguments against the proposal. Many of my questions were to clarify the contradictions between the CRMP Plan (County Resource Management Plan she had authored and was agreed to by the City of Santa Rosa) and the report by Marco Waaland.

While many people think it is a good deal and fair trade to have an environmentally sensitive golf course on the east of Kelly Farm and have the remaining 180 acres to the west be restored to a wildlife habitat, the Laguna Foundation does not. Councilman Berto suggested that a percentage of the green fees could go to Sebastopol and the Laguna Foundation to do park restoration. However, environmentally the trade is just not worth it. As Kim Cordell said, if they have to wait three generations they will, in order to have all of Kelly Farm restored.

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Understand that there is no economic incentive for Santa Rosa to do anything else but continue to irrigate for silage on Kelly Farm. They are not going to give it to the Laguna Foundation. Mayor Wright offered an open invitation for someone to come up with a solution that would pay them for the land and costs of irrigation and provide another area to irrigate. If you can find a solution, please contact the city of Santa Rosa. Otherwise they will continue to irrigate Kelly Farm if no golf course is built there.

I do not believe the majority of residents in Sebastopol want a golf course on Kelly Farm. I know there are many golfers who would like it and that it would be an affordable public course with classes for children. I also know there is a core of opposition that is willing to sue and will stick it out as long as it takes to defeat the effort.

I told Mayor Wright that in my opinion, it is not worth pursuing. The Sebastopol City Council will meet on this issue and offer a formal opinion to Santa Rosa. I do not know what my fellow councilmembers will say, but I for one would caution Santa Rosa to not proceed.

(Kathy Austin is the mayor of Sebastopol)