



**STAFF REPORT TO THE MARIN COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION**

SANTA VENETIA COMMUNITY PLAN

Recommendation: **Recommend approval to the Board of
Supervisors**
Hearing Date: **October 27, 2014**

Agenda Item: 4.

Planning Staff: Christine Gimmler, Senior Planner
Jack Liebster, Planning Manager

Signature:

Environmental Determination:

Adoption of the Santa Venetia Community Plan has been determined to be Statutorily Exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to Section 15262 of the CEQA Guidelines as a planning study which does not approve, adopt, or fund future actions or activities.

SUMMARY

The Santa Venetia Community Plan is a planning document which provides information and sets forth goals, policies, and guidance related to issues relevant to the unincorporated community of Santa Venetia. Specific topic areas addressed in the plan include natural resources, environmental hazards, land use, community character, parks and open space, and transportation. The plan was developed with the ongoing participation of Santa Venetia residents, including a nine member Advisory Committee, over the course of eighteen months.

BACKGROUND

Historically, the preparation of new or updated community plans has been a time consuming and staff intensive undertaking. In 2012, the Marin County Board of Supervisors adopted a more strategic and efficient approach to the community plan process which focuses on Countywide Plan implementation and consideration of any unique planning issues within a community which are not already addressed by existing policies and programs. Referred to as the Community Plan Update Strategy, this approach is intended to ensure that resources are used effectively and the resulting community plan document is relevant and useful. Accordingly, the Update Strategy incorporates the following guidelines:

- Address implementation of relevant Countywide Plan policies at a detailed community level where appropriate.
- Avoid duplication or inconsistency with policies, guidelines, and regulations that are already in place, particularly for issues that are most appropriately addressed on a uniform basis countywide.
- Minimize inclusion of extensive background information which is quickly outdated or has limited relevance to the regulatory process.
- Utilize a document format which incorporates graphic elements (illustrations, photographs, maps, etc.) to create more concise, useful, and engaging plans.
- Incorporate a predetermined schedule of task force and community meetings to keep the process on track.
- Utilize new technology to encourage widespread community input and participation.

In early 2013, Santa Venetia was selected as a priority candidate for a new community plan under the newly approved update strategy due to the absence of an existing community plan for this planning area well as the level of interest demonstrated by the residents of Santa Venetia, who had been actively advocating for a community plan since early 2011.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Preparation of the Santa Venetia Community Plan has involved extensive community input starting early in the process, as summarized below.

Advisory Committee Meetings: An Advisory Committee comprised of nine community representatives appointed by Supervisor Susan Adams met with staff on a monthly basis over the course of 18 months to discuss the plan and provide guidance on the scope, public outreach, community engagement, and draft policies.

Public Meetings: Three community-wide public workshops were held during development of the community plan to engage residents, encourage the sharing of information and ideas, and to obtain input and feedback on various issues including the draft plan itself. The workshops were conducted on August 29, 2013 (Korean Presbyterian Church), June 9, 2014 (Osher Marin Jewish Community Center), and October 7, 2014 (Marin Center Exhibit Hall).

Online Engagement: A website was developed for the planning effort which has provided all public materials at www.marincounty.org/santavenetia. The website also offers a subscription service for the public to receive email notifications of the project and there are currently 235 email subscribers. Residents were also offered opportunities to participate through several online topic forums via Open Marin and Survey Monkey.

Santa Venetia Neighborhood Association (SVNA): The SVNA is an active neighborhood group with over 500 members. During preparation of the plan, staff attended several regularly scheduled SVNA meetings to provide updates on the plan process. In addition, SVNA members assisted staff in publicizing events and opportunities to get involved by publishing notifications of public meetings and providing updates on the community plan in their bimonthly newsletter and posting notices on the SVNA website and through SVNA email lists (Yahoo Group, BigTent, and Next Door Santa Venetia).

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Community Development Agency has provided public notice of the Planning Commission hearing to consider the Santa Venetia Community Plan to all residents within the community plan area. Similar public notice was provided prior to community workshops on the plan held August 29, 2013, and June 9, 2014.

CONTENTS OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The Santa Venetia Community Plan is organized into seven chapters, which are summarized below:

1. Introduction

The introduction outlines the community plan preparation process and explains the relationship between community plans and the Countywide Plan. It also contains a list of goals, adapted from the Countywide Plan, which were selected by the Advisory Committee to form the framework of the community plan.

2. Background

Chapter 2 summarizes background material including Santa Venetia's location in the county with respect to the Countywide Plan's environmental corridors and describes some of the external entities which influence the community, such as the City of San Rafael, San Rafael City Schools, and the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) system. The chapter also provides demographic and historical information about Santa Venetia.

3. Natural Resources

The natural resources chapter gives an overview of the many existing policies and programs contained in the Countywide Plan intended to protect, restore, and enhance watersheds, natural habitats, and sensitive species in Marin. Existing development code and zoning regulations including the Native Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance and the Bayfront Conservation District are also explained and summarized. This chapter also contains a description of the natural resource areas most valued by Santa Venetia's residents, as well as some of the issues related to those resources. Finally, the plan describes how Countywide Plan policies apply to Santa Venetia in a comprehensive manner, avoiding the need for additional, duplicative policies in the community plan itself.

4. Environmental Hazards

The environmental hazards chapter focuses on two issues of particular concern to Santa Venetians, flooding and sea level rise. As described in the plan, flood control is a complicated issue largely within the jurisdiction and operational responsibilities of federal, state, and local agencies outside of the Community Development Agency. Therefore, detailed direction or policies on this topic are beyond the scope of the community plan. However, the plan does provide an overview of ongoing efforts by the Flood Control District established for Santa

Venetia (Flood Control Zone 7), working in conjunction with the Marin County Watershed Program, to minimize flooding in the community and undertake projects that integrate both flood protection and environmental restoration within the Gallinas Creek watershed. The plan also includes a description of County Service Area #6, which was formed to dredge the Gallinas Creek channel and provides a brief summary of the role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in regulating development in flood zones and administering flood insurance. Finally, this chapter acknowledges community concerns regarding sea level rise and lays out conceptual guidance supporting future work to determine specific impacts and appropriate adaptation strategies for Santa Venetia.

5. Land Use and Community Character

Chapter 5 addresses land uses in Santa Venetia and provides a brief discussion of development potential in the community, including detailed descriptions of three potential development sites that have been of particular interest to the community. This chapter describes existing tools used to protect community character, including the Design Review process and the County's Single-family and Multi-family Residential Design Guidelines and Ridge and Upland Greenbelt (RUG) development standards. A brief description of the County's existing noise ordinances is also included. With respect to future development, the community plan includes policies recommending a comprehensive planning approach, based upon active citizen involvement, to address future development and redevelopment in Santa Venetia, particularly on larger and multi-parcel properties. Policies are also included to pursue rezoning of RUG properties (consistent with Countywide Plan program DES-4.e), minimize noise impacts of new uses on surrounding residential areas, and support community-based "neighborhood beautification" efforts.

6. Parks and Open Space

Chapter 6 describes how parks and open space preserves are planned, managed and funded in Marin County and provides an overview of the various parks and open space resources in and around Santa Venetia. This chapter also identifies a number of suggestions from the community for consideration as part of future park planning efforts, including improved public access to shoreline areas, additional park restroom facilities and recreational fields, and support for a community center.

7. Transportation

Traffic congestion is another issue of particular concern in Santa Venetia. Chapter 7 describes traffic circulation conditions and constraints in the community, and explains how traffic impacts of new development are analyzed. The plan summarizes existing Countywide Plan policies supporting alternative transportation modes (walking, biking, public transit) and describes the County process for planning and implementing bike and pedestrian facilities through the Marin County Unincorporated Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. The Safe Routes to School Program is also noted as an important tool for prioritizing and funding bike and pedestrian improvements in the vicinity of schools, and the plan identifies specific opportunities for additional routes that should be studied. Although existing public transit service in Santa Venetia is somewhat limited, construction the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) passenger rail project will significantly increase transit options for Santa Venetia. To address

circulation issues in Santa Venetia, the community plan includes a variety of policies intended to reduce existing congestion through new or enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facilities and to ensure that the traffic impacts of new development area accurately assessed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

To date, staff has received two letters of comment on the draft community plan which are provided as Attachment 2 and 3.

Correspondence from Elaine Reichert comments on progress made by the Department of Public Works to improve drainage in Santa Venetia, and notes her opposition to the idea of purchasing properties from willing sellers in areas highly threatened by environmental hazards. As noted in the plan, the feasibility and funding for this concept has not been determined, but was suggested by some community members as an idea that may warrant further consideration in the future.

In her letter of October 16th, Ellen Stein questions statements made in the community plan regarding the historical development of Santa Venetia and requests that more detailed information be included regarding dredging alternatives, levee improvements, and determination of property boundaries along Gallinas Creek. Background information regarding the historical development of Santa Venetia was obtained from Flood Control Zone 7 and Gallinas Watershed Program documents which acknowledge that flood prone portions of Santa Venetia were constructed in the early 1900's on low-lying fill over compressible bay mud. This information was included in the plan to explain conditions which have exacerbated flood hazards in the community. As noted previously in the staff report and in the community plan itself, flood control and dredging are very complex and technical issues. Although the plan is intended to provide an overview of the various County, state and federal programs and efforts already underway to address these issues, detailed information, determinations, or recommendations regarding these topics are beyond the scope of the community plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the administrative record, conduct a public hearing, and approve the attached resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt the Santa Venetia Community Plan.

Attachments:

1. Recommended Resolution
2. Elaine Reichert letter, 10/8/14
3. Ellen Stein letter, 10/16/14

In order to save resources, paper copies of the following documents are only provided to the Planning Commission. All the documents are available for review in the Planning Division offices and the draft Santa Venetia Community Plan is also available online at www.marincounty.org/santavenetia.

4. Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan