



Santa Venetia Community Plan
Community Meeting #1 - August 29, 2013
Summary of Public Comments

The following is a summary of the input received at the August 29, 2013 Santa Venetia community meeting. This summary does not represent the opinions of County staff, but rather public opinion based on feedback received through written comments and group discussion.

Valued Attributes of the Santa Venetia Community

Santa Venetian's value their community's beautiful natural setting and strong sense of community. The ability to live in proximity to parks, open space areas, wildlife habitats and the Bay in a convenient, centrally-located area is considered to be a major benefit. Residents appreciate having access to outdoor destinations such as the Santa Venetia Marsh Preserve and Gallinas Creek, China Camp State Park, Santa Margarita Island, and the San Pedro Mountain Preserve as well as smaller community parks (Pueblo Park, Candy's Park, Adrian Rosal Park) and the Civic Center Lagoon, Dog Park, and Petanque Court. The many open space and natural areas surrounding Santa Venetia give the community a peaceful and quiet atmosphere, and the adjoining bay and creek shorelines are valued both for their visual beauty and for recreational purposes.

The residents of Santa Venetia also value their strong sense of community created by "great neighbors" and the active involvement of friendly and easygoing residents. Community members appreciate the diversity of the community and value that the area is attractive to young families and relatively affordable, with a range of home sizes to meet the needs of the community's diverse population. To some, the area's "village" feeling creates a comfortable rural atmosphere that is a unique community asset.

Finally, Santa Venetian's value and support their local businesses. In particular, the community appreciates the Santa Venetia Market and Rocky's Meats, Bogies Café, Chalet Basque, and the Northgate gas station. Many residents also value proximity to a variety of community-serving assets such as the Civic Center campus, Farmer's Market, Jewish Community Center, and Venetia Valley School.

Important Issues that the Santa Venetia Community Plan Should Address

Community Involvement/Engagement

Santa Venetia residents enjoy a strong sense of community. However, they also noted issues related to community involvement that could be improved, such as the level of engagement with local schools and the inclusion of a more diverse range of residents. Suggestions on this topic include holding a regular community "volunteer day" at schools, improving outreach to youth, seniors, and residents of various cultural backgrounds, providing multi-lingual notices of meetings and events, and establishing a cultural and community center in Santa Venetia (for example, at the MacPhail's site). Another issue of concern is the impact of decisions made by the City of San Rafael, which adjoins Santa Venetia to the west and north. In response, suggestions were made to establish a community liaison to represent the interests of Santa Venetia at the City and to consider partnering with other nearby community groups on issues of common interest.

Flood Control

Flooding is a major concern identified by Santa Venetia residents. In particular, property damage and increased insurance rates are of concern as well as the potential that future sea level rise and global climate change may exacerbate existing conditions. Suggestions to address this issue include completing improvements to raise and strengthen existing levees, improving pump stations where necessary, installing a flood warning system, providing loans for residents interested in raising their homes to meet flood elevation requirements, dredging Gallinas Creek, looking for ways to reduce insurance costs, and potentially expanding Flood Zone 7 to include hillside properties.

Land Use/Development

Concerns were expressed that inappropriate development adversely impacts community character and should be addressed in the community plan. The residential project “33 North” was cited as an example of the type of development that raised community concerns related to size, height, and visibility . Ideas for ensuring more appropriate development include prohibiting “high-rise” development of 4-5 stories, restricting further development on ridgelines, placing limits on the size of new homes, providing for reduced densities in more rural areas, and imposing a moratorium on additional building. There was also a high level of interest in the potential future development of the MacPhail’s (former) school site. Residents expressed a preference to maintain the open character of the MacPhail’s site and suggested that the community should be involved in decisions regarding the use of this property. They emphasized that any development should benefit the community and suggested the uses of the property for a park or community center as an ideal. Residents also cited concerns about noise, particularly noise generated by late night deliveries at the 7-11, construction related noise, and noise generated by events on the Civic Center campus. Residents suggested prohibiting 24 hour businesses, better enforcement of existing noise ordinances (including restrictions on allowable construction hours), and conducting sound checks for Civic Center events. Finally, concerns were also expressed regarding light pollution. Although adequate lighting for safety should be provided, residents of Santa Venetia are interested in preserving “dark skies” in their neighborhood.

Natural Resources

Community members noted that wetland and creek conservation, tree protection, and air quality impacts (resulting from wood smoke and vehicle exhaust) are issues that should be addressed. However, specific suggestions were limited to a proposal to refine the County’s existing tree preservation ordinance to prohibit the removal of heritage trees.

Neighborhood Maintenance/Nuisance Issues

Residents are very concerned about upkeep and maintenance of public and private improvements in Santa Venetia, as well as “nuisance” issues such as lack of parking, overcrowded housing, home-based businesses with parking impacts, garbage and rodent problems, illegal dumping, and sidewalks that are poorly maintained or blocked by cars or vegetation. Suggestions to address some of these issues include the use of neighborhood volunteers to advise and assist with maintenance, clean-up and landscaping of residential properties and businesses, more police to patrol streets and enforce parking restrictions, additional resources to fix sidewalks, better placement of garbage cans and dumpsters in certain areas, a quicker response to dumping, imposing limitations on the number of occupants per housing unit, and the establishment of a County position dedicated to addressing blight. It was also suggested that the County should be responsible for maintenance of median strips along North San Pedro Road. Finally, the undergrounding of telephone and utility lines was suggested as a means to improve neighborhood appearance.

Parks and Open Space

Santa Venetia’s existing parks and open space areas are highly valued by the community. However, residents noted that public recreational access to the water is limited, and suggested the possibility of building a public boat launch (for example, at Santa Margarita Island or the MacPhail’s site). There was also support for the use of park funds to purchase additional open space areas, as well as to provide restrooms at existing parks such as Pueblo Park. For security reasons, residents suggested park restrooms should be locked at night, and proposed the use of signage and patrols to discourage loitering. Other suggestions include constructing a community ball field and discouraging off-leash dogs along the levees in proximity to sensitive wildlife areas.

Transportation

Santa Venetia residents expressed concerns over both the amount and speed of traffic in their community. Traffic congestion along North San Pedro Road and at the North San Pedro Road/Civic Center Drive intersection affects the quality of life for residents. In particular, traffic congestion during morning and evening commute hours and during drop off/pick up times for local schools was identified as a problem. Speeding along North San Pedro Road is also a concern. Suggestions to address traffic generated by school uses include better coordination of school start times, improved promotion and viability of biking and carpooling options, the use of more school buses, encouraging home schooling, and providing a neighborhood “traffic director” – a community volunteer to assist with directing traffic to improve utilization of two-way turn lanes. Other suggestions to ease traffic congestion in general include improvements to the North San Pedro/Highway 101 interchange area, providing more bike lanes and routes, limiting additional development, and constructing a pedestrian/bike bridge from Santa Venetia to the McInnis area. To address speeding traffic, residents suggested the use of traffic calming measure such as speed bumps, flashing signage to indicate speed, and “children playing” signs.