



Santa Venetia Community Plan
Community Meeting #2 – June 9, 2014
Summary of Public Comments

The following is a summary of the input received at the June 9, 2014 Santa Venetia community meeting. Feedback that was submitted via email, letter, or on Open Marin from those unable to attend the meeting in person has also been included in the summary. This summary does not represent the opinions of County staff, but rather public opinion based on feedback received.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND DEVELOPMENT

Community Character

Santa Venetia residents describe their neighborhood as a small, semi-rural community that is mostly quiet, peaceful and safe— a place people feel proud of. Many describe it as friendly and close knit, while some expressed the idea of a “live and let live” character, reflecting the independent, tolerant spirit of the community. While many community members have been long term residents, some perceive that the community is becoming more diverse, with new young families and “environmentally minded” residents. Santa Venetia is conveniently located with easy access to Highway 101 and close proximity to San Rafael, and yet provides access to nature, open space, and the bay, which is highly valued by its residents. While some commented that the community lacks a cohesive feel or style, one resident noted, “Having only one road in and out of Santa Venetia makes it a natural community with real borders and a sense of wholeness. This can be developed into a strong cohesive sense of place.” Overall, Santa Venetia is seen as a diverse, tolerant community with beautiful natural resources, conveniently located but set apart and quiet. There is interest in preserving those traits.

Development

As noted in the 2011 Santa Venetia Community Survey, development is a continuing concern for many residents. Many feel that Santa Venetia is overburdened with increasing traffic and the impacts of development outside its borders and would like to see additional construction kept to a minimum. Several “key” properties of concern within Santa Venetia include “Oxford Valley” (70 Oxford Rd.) and the former MacPhail’s School site (1565 Vendola Dr). Other areas or sites of concern include:

- Civic Center campus
- Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART)
- Permanent Farmers Market
- Buck’s Launching
- Commercial area at Oxford and North San Pedro Road
- Waterford Terrace

About two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that they would be willing to participate in a community-based planning process related to major development proposals in Santa Venetia, such as subdivisions. There was also interest in beautifying the community and making it more walkable.

Development Criteria

Residents gave feedback on siting and design criteria that could guide future development in Santa Venetia. Each participant indicated their top three choices, described below according to which criteria were most often selected (most important to the community), down to the least-selected (least important) criteria. The criteria deemed most important were: “Preserve as much of a site as possible for open space”; “Minimize traffic impacts”; and “Provide maximum protection to environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. wetlands, streams, habitat for endangered species).” Other important criteria included: “Minimize grading and preserve natural topography”; “Avoid development in flood zones or known geologic hazard areas”; and “Ensure that development is compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.” Less frequently selected criteria included: “Locate development to minimize visibility from nearby neighbors”; and “Avoid noise and light impacts on surrounding development.”

PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Most used and valued parks and open space areas:

- Santa Venetia Marsh
- Santa Margarita Island
- China Camp State Park
- Neighborhood parks like Pueblo, Castro and Candy’s Park
- Civic Center and Civic Center Lagoon
- San Pedro Mountain Open Space Preserve

Suggested park and open space improvements

Community members expressed interest in improving access to recreation such as hiking, biking, and boating. Specific suggestions included improving signage and maps at trailheads, and keeping mountain bikes off hiking trails, especially within the San Pedro Open Space Preserve. Some residents felt there should be more restrooms and water fountains, while others were concerned about potential impacts of restrooms in terms of cost, maintenance, and safety. There is interest in improving public access to Gallinas Creek by increasing the number of canoe and kayak launches, and support for the potential acquisition of Buck’s Launching as a County park.

Residents rated the extent to which they agreed with several suggestions for park and open space improvements. The highest level of agreement was expressed for more access to the water (ex. public boat launch), and acquisition of Buck’s Launching as a County park. There was slightly less support for having additional restrooms in community parks. Significantly fewer residents supported suggestions for the development of additional recreational fields or the creation of a community center in the neighborhood.

Important natural resources

Residents indicated that natural resources in Santa Venetia that are most important to them include: Gallinas Creek for its wildlife habitat and calming water views; Santa Margarita Island; 650 N. San Pedro Rd. or “Heron Hill” for habitat, drainage, and forest; Oak woodlands, streams and marshes for wildlife protection and views. Community members were also asked their opinions regarding potential threats to Santa Venetia’s natural resources. The top ranked threats included invasive plants and wildlife, human disturbance, development, and pollution/contaminants.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

Areas most used for walking and biking:

- Santa Margarita Island
- China Camp
- Open Space Preserves
- Santa Venetia Marsh and levees
- North San Pedro Rd. and neighborhood streets
- Civic Center and Lagoon Park

Suggested bicycle and pedestrian improvements

Many residents supported improvements for bicycle and pedestrian circulation. Suggestions included improving roads and sidewalks, and stricter enforcement of traffic laws to control speeding and ensure that drivers yield to pedestrians. Informal pathways currently used within the neighborhoods could be improved to encourage more use by school children and other residents. Better and more clearly identified bike lanes and paths would make areas like the highway underpass and the route along North San Pedro Rd. to China Camp safer. However, there was a concern about a proposed bike route up Sunny Oaks Dr., which may be too narrow and dangerous for cyclists.

Residents rated the extent to which they agreed with several suggestions related to bicycle and pedestrian circulation. Overall, there was very strong support for the maintenance and repair of sidewalks, pathways and pedestrian lanes. Residents also supported consideration of bicycle/pedestrian improvements along N. San Pedro Rd. at Highway 101 as part of potential interchange modifications as well as bike route alternatives to N. San Pedro Rd.

TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION

Residents shared many ideas for reducing traffic congestion in Santa Venetia, the most popular responses being to limit new development and encourage the use of carpools/school buses/shuttles. Others suggested that no development should occur without traffic mitigation. Parking was a concern, and it was noted that the JCC should provide enough parking for all of its members. It was widely acknowledged that school drop off was a major factor in traffic congestion, and several people provided suggestions to alleviate it. For example, return Venetia Valley to use as a neighborhood school where resident children can walk or bike to school, improve bike and walking path access to schools, and develop a student drop off area at the Jury parking lot or the Post Office. Many residents would like to see more transit use overall, and especially by youth. Some felt it would be helpful to re-route the local circulator straight to central San Rafael (rather than via Dominican University). There was also interest in developing safe bike routes to the planned SMART station, Northgate area, and San Rafael, and restricting traffic speeds on North San Pedro Road.

Residents rated the extent to which they agreed with several suggestions related to improving traffic flow. Overall, there was very strong support for requiring development projects to analyze “worst case” traffic conditions in traffic studies (i.e. weekday a.m. peak hour during the school year), encouraging the use of alternative transportation modes whenever possible, and considering establishment of a “drop off zone” for Venetia Valley School in the Civic Center jury parking lot. Regulating hours of operation (where possible) to minimize congestion and studying the feasibility of modifying Highway 101/N San Pedro Road interchange to improve traffic flow were also popular suggestions.

FLOOD CONTROL

Flooding is a major concern in Santa Venetia, and there were many comments and suggestions related to flood control. There is support for measures that would provide additional protection from flooding, with several ideas about how this could be accomplished, from repairing the levees, to dredging the creek on a regular basis, to capturing storm water for irrigation. However, many also recognize the challenge of funding flood control projects. Since funding from the Army Corps of Engineers for levee improvements is not anticipated, it was noted that taxes may need to be raised as a source of funds. Concerns were also expressed about the rising cost of flood insurance, and it was noted that FEMA will be holding meetings about the new FEMA flood maps (and their implications for flood insurance rates) in July 2014. Finally, many residents were unaware of the Gallinas Creek Watershed Program, which is run in partnership with the Marin County Flood Control District to address flood control concerns in Santa Venetia and the larger watershed. Several people requested to be added to the mailing list. More information on this program is available at marinwatersheds.org

CLIMATE CHANGE

About two-thirds of respondents felt that climate change is an issue of high concern to Santa Venetia and several residents expressed concern about the impacts of sea level rise in particular. One resident suggested that a major flood barrier will be needed to contain Gallinas Creek as the ocean rises, while another felt that an “orderly retreat” plan would be more appropriate than trying to fight the rising tides. For example, there was a suggestion that properties in low-lying areas should be purchased by the County when they come up for sale, and rented out, possibly at affordable levels, until such time as they are no longer habitable.