

**DRAFT**  
**STRAWBERRY DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**  
118 E. STRAWBERRY DRIVE, MILL VALLEY, CA 94941  
October 17, 2016 MEETING NOTES

SUMMARY

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman, Isis Spinola-Schwartz, called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Members present:        Isis Spinola-Schwartz  
                                 Joe Sherer  
                                 Penna Omega  
                                 Rebecca Lind

**II. Administration and Other Business**

The Board discussed the meeting minutes of September 19 and after made changes to clarify comments about the Design Review Application at 29 Knoll Road,        by the Hamilton Trust.

Motion by Joe Sherer second by Rebecca Lind to approve the minutes of September 19, 2016 as amended. There were no comments on non-agenda items.

**III. Agenda Items**

Seminary Development:  
Applicant: North Coast Land Holdings LLC  
                 Suite 360, San Rafael, CA 94901  
Planner     Jeremy Tejirian

**IV. Recommendation**

After extensive community input on multiple hearings, with hundreds of Strawberry residents, the proposed development does not conform to the original Use Permit or the Strawberry Community Plan and its proposed amendments are not acceptable. Therefore the Strawberry Design Review Board recommends:

1. Deny the proposed amendments to the Strawberry Community Plan, Master Plan, amendment, Precise Development Plan, Use Permit, Vesting Tentative Map, and Tree Removal Permit.
2. Encourage the applicant to submit an alternative development proposal that is more in keeping with the existing Strawberry Community Plan
3. If the applicant desires to amend the Strawberry Community Plan the first step is to engage the community in a series of meetings.

**V. Comments to the Planning Staff**

The meeting was held in the Strawberry Community Center gymnasium and was attended by approximately 200 + members of the public. Thomas Lai and Jeremy Tejirian from the Planning Department and Supervisor Kate Sears were present. Chairman Spinola-Schwartz explained that this is a continuation of the meeting from September 19<sup>th</sup> to provide the opportunity for the applicant to address the community. She announced the meeting format and explained that the applicant's team would have 30 minutes for a presentation, and the public 30 minutes to comment. She requested that questions be addressed to the Board.

## **Applicant Presentation**

The project architect Mark Cavagnero presented an overview of the proposal including a history of the Seminary campus development, comparison of density in Strawberry and several other Marin communities contrasted to the lower proposed density for the project, a summary of what was previously built under the approved Seminary master plan, and a tally of the remaining development capacity under that plan. He presented the proposed site plan, schematic building concepts and a summary of the educational and housing building programs. He stated that for the academic campus the proposal is to complete the previously approved buildings, refresh existing buildings, increase landscaping and open up the campus to the view. He stated that proposed density was 2.47 dwelling units per acre consistent with the Seminary Master Plan approval, that although proposed unit size and residential square footage is greater than the size of the existing units, parking for the residential component is underground and the proposed site plan has 20% more open space than the approved master plan.

Chris Mazzola representing the Branson School stated that Branson can and will be a good neighbor and an asset to the community. She explained that the current location of the school, the Ross Valley, is in the heart of Marin and is more remote and inwardly focused. The school desires to expand and serve a broader community. She stated that the mission of the school is to train young men and women to be leaders and that it is the school's goal to offer this extraordinary educational experience to a more diverse student body, and that sharing what they do so well is important. She outlined ways the school hopes to work with the Strawberry community to address traffic, noise, and the sports programs.

The proposal includes a state of the art traffic management plan. The school will have a closed campus with no onsite drop off. 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders will use carpools of three to four students. At peak enrollment it is anticipated that one half of the students would arrive on buses. There would be no teacher arrival between 7:30 and 8:30. There would be a full time traffic management officer. The maximum enrollment of 1000 students is not anticipated for 30 years. Open space would be open for use to the local community.

She concluded that schools make communities better and that excellent schools elevate property values. It is the Branson School's desire to make Strawberry the strongest community in Marin.

Lawrence Lewis, Transportation Consultant presented the traffic analysis and Transportation Demand Management Plan. He stated that based on the vehicle generation rates used in the International Traffic Engineers (ITE) manual and the measures proposed in the project with the Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDM), the project would not generate more trips than the level of development approved in the 1984 Master Plan. The project is a build out of the prior Master Plan. His opinion was that TDM is comprehensive and includes multiple traffic mitigation techniques but that the focus of the TDM is to expand the busing program. Implementation of the various measures will occur as enrollment increases. Analysis by an independent traffic engineer will provide additional peer review at the EIR stage of the project.

## **Comments from Group Representatives**

Riley Hurd, representing the Seminary Neighborhood Association, asked the Board to recommend denial of the application at this stage of review. He said that it would send a strong signal to the applicant to have a recommendation of denial come from the community prior to CEQA. He stated that CEQA guideline Section 15220 allow for denial prior to CEQA. Mr. Hurd further stated that the Seminary Neighborhood Association understands that change is coming to the Seminary site and is not opposed to something being developed there. He stated that the Association hired a consultant to produce a residential only project concept to demonstrate that an alternative to this proposal is financially feasible.

He asked the following questions.

1. Why does the traffic analysis use an imaginary baseline?
2. Why are the dorm rooms included?
3. Why is the property owner currently using the site for more than a seminary, for illegal uses in violation of the Community Plan?

He stated that the application should be denied but that at a minimum the application could be suspended to consider amendments to the Strawberry Community Plan.

Ray McDevitt representing the Board of the Strawberry Community Association endorsed the recommendation from Mr. Hurd. He recommended that the County form a citizen's advisory committee to review the Community Plan.

Mr. McDevitt commented on the updated Affordable Housing document, Exhibit 27, submitted last week. He expressed concern over the request for an addition of a maximum 20% density bonus and noted that this bonus provides for an additional 96 units - bringing the total number of housing units proposed to 410 units. He stated that additional analysis is needed to address this larger number of units. Specifically:

- a. There are no updates provided to the site plan showing these units;
- b. There is no adjustment to the density calculation;
- c. There is no adjustment to the increased traffic generation.

Mr. McDevitt presented an additional concern with inconsistency of information about the traffic plan presented in a letter submitted in August. He stated that the letter references traffic generation of 170 trips/day, but that the existing Branson school generated 220 trips per day. He also expressed concern about Table 4 of the Traffic Management Plan, stating that the Plan does not say how Table 4 will be implemented.

Taylor Safford representing De Silva Island asked why submit a Community Plan amendment. He suggested dropping Branson from the Plan.

A representative from the Strawberry Cove Homeowners Association raised a concern about wildlife habitat, noting that this is important issue that is not addressed. He asked whether limitations on wildlife habitat would restrict development. He also commented that there is nothing about parking and asked "where will all the cars go"?

He also asked "why not restrict all development during the drought"?

#### Individual Comments

1. There are 17 intersections that need to be considered and are not studied adequately.
2. I have no problems with the Branson School per se, but don't want a commuter school at this location.
3. Even with an ambitious traffic mitigation program there will be gridlock most of the day.
4. The traffic mitigation program is unrealistic and unachievable.
5. I am concerned about bicycle safety for existing residents
6. The 1984 Seminary units are different from market rate units. It is a different land use.
7. Does the traffic analysis consider the background traffic from the new medical facility at the Strawberry Center?
8. The Seminary proposal is too dense.
9. What is in it for Strawberry?? Nothing—less than nothing.
10. I don't believe any of the plans. Based on the experience so far they expect us to accept this but I don't buy it in any way.
11. I like the Baptists, I disagree with the replacement of the existing affordable housing.
12. The transportation study is not credible because traffic in does not equal traffic out.
13. The reason Strawberry feels so strongly about this project is because the previous owner did not pay property tax. The public subsidized it so we feel some entitlement. The Branson School in Ross has a property tax exemption certificate. They won't pay property tax to maintain streets, fire, emergency services and other things property tax supports.
14. I have concern about traffic safety
15. There has been no outreach to the community
16. This speaker had several points
  - a. The proposal is a significant deviation from the Community Plan
  - b. There is a complete lack of outreach to the community
  - c. Recommend denying the current application
  - d. Encourage the applicant to work with the community
  - e. Suggest assisted living/senior housing
  - f. The Marin population is stable and not growing. This proposal will bring kids in from other areas.
  - g. Consider satellite schools
17. I want to support the Strawberry Design Review Board process. I oppose a separate community advisory group. Keep review within this forum. Continue the application until the applicant comes back with a proposal that addresses community concerns. I am also concerned about the loss of 150 affordable units.
18. Branson neighbors in Ross don't love them. Kids park in the neighborhoods and ump in to carpools to drive into the school
19. There is a dangerous traffic situation on Reed Blvd. Reed Blvd is a quicker way in from 101 south. There is a 1 lane road by the fire station with 2 way traffic.
20. Seminary housing is being rented out to people who are not part of the Seminary.

21. I am a father of a 15 year old HS babysitter who hadn't heard of the Branson School but had heard of "no Branson".
22. I thank Branson for coming tonight. Mostly I'm concerned about what happens to the community. There are merits to a school. Branson does have stringent rules about parking and traffic. Branson sees itself as a responsible citizen in Ross and has actual experience with these concerns.
23. I am a signatory of the 1984 Community Plan Update. The committee never envisioned 300 units of market rate housing or of the rental units going away. I am concerned that this proposal is asking for both Branson and housing development. The kind of massing being proposed was never conceived of.
24. The project will have 300-400 residents going to work while students are coming in along with nannies and landscapers. This is not addressed.
25. We see how the developer is violating the rules by renting out existing units to non-seminarians.
26. Address the Texas land company in language they can understand
27. I live in a condo facing Seminary Drive. Traffic will back up on my 2 lane street. Congestion from traffic going north on 101 starts at 2:30 in the afternoon. I feel property values are going down due to this traffic.
28. I am a land use planner retained by the Seminary Neighborhood Association. This project was continued from the last meeting but I notice that the developer has made no change. It is important to give a strong message to the developer that this is a failed plan and not rely on CEQA.
29. Despite the plans and intentions of the Branson School students will drive to high school if they have a car.

#### Board Discussion with the Applicant

Joe Sherer stated his concern about using the maximum allowable development from the 1984 Master Plan as a baseline for the plan proposals and for the traffic analysis. He also expressed concern about the affordable housing bonus. He asked the developer what the justification is for the proposed maximum allowable baseline. He stated the Community plan supports single family development.

Mr. Cavagnero responded by saying that the proposal is consistent with the adopted master plan so the baseline numbers used for the analysis were generated from the maximum development allowed for that Plan

Julie Brown followed up that comment by requesting an explanation of the increase in the size of proposed housing units compared to the sizes of the original student housing on site. She asked what was behind the unit size assumption of 1750 sq. ft. when the current average size is 654 sq.ft. per unit and even a 2 bedroom average is 880 sq. ft.

A representative of North Coast Landing LLC explained that the size of the larger President's house was used as a template for the proposed new housing as the larger living units are more desirable to avoid children's toys and other family articles being stored outside as currently happens with the existing smaller units.

Julie also questioned the density bonus and requested an explanation of how the additional housing proposed was calculated but not analyzed as part of the plan proposal now before the Board.

Alisa Guerra, Attorney representing the applicant, responded by stating that the density bonus complies with the County code which allows an applicant to request the maximum bonus permitted at the time of the initial application. The goal is to achieve overall conformance with the master plan as amended which would allow up to 410 dwelling units at this point. Because the applicant does not yet know what issues may arise through the CEQA process, the maximum possible density bonus is requested as a kind of placeholder to preserve the applicant's ability to ultimately make this request. A revised Affordable Housing Plan changing the number of units and making other changes could be a response to an alternative which may occur through CEQA. Mr. Lewis, traffic engineer for the applicant confirmed that the traffic analysis before the Board does not include an analysis of the additional units requested in the affordable Housing Plan.

Brown questioned why the applicant did not respond to the county's request for historical numbers of students living on campus in their Response Matrix. She offered Mr. Cavagnero information from the GGBTS on student residents and housing sizes available from 2006-2016. Brown also submitted copies of the information to board members and the county for the record.

Penna Omega asked what the applicant is planning to do to involve the community. Mr. Cavanaugh responded that the developer's team has had 10 to 12 small meetings with the community.

Isis Spinola-Schwartz stated that her concern is that they have not engaged with us (the Board), that we have had many questions that remain unanswered and that the developer has been unresponsive to the community's comments.

Rebecca Lind stated that her primary concern is with the proposed Community Plan amendment which is inadequate. She stated that a simple legislative strikeout version as submitted only substitutes words to change the plan in a way that meets the developer's interest. It does not engage the vision and purpose of the community plan or the Transportation Element. Major sections of the plan need to be updated consistent with the vision of the community before this project should be reviewed. Some portions of the original 1979 Community Plan that were not updated in 1984 also need to be reviewed. She stated that a piecemeal approach to the policy issues inherent in the Community Plan is not acceptable. She suggested that a citizen task force be convened or that the Board of Supervisors request that the Design Review Board undertake this effort. The applicant did not offer a response to these comments.

In addition Lind questioned why the lower student housing traffic generation rate of 5.9 trips per unit was used throughout the traffic analysis for all proposed unit types noting that this is another point of conflict between the proposal and the Community plan which references 10 trips for single family, 7 trips for multifamily and 5 trips for student housing unit types.

Mr. Lewis responded that the lower rate for traffic generation was used due to the proposed mitigation in the Traffic Demand Management Plan.

#### Board Deliberation and Recommendation

Motion by Joe Sherer, second by Julie Brown that after extensive community input on multiple hearings, with hundreds of Strawberry residents, the proposed development does not conform to the original Use Permit or the Strawberry Community Plan and its proposed amendments are not acceptable. Therefore the Strawberry Design Review Board recommends:

1. Deny the proposed amendments to the Strawberry Community Plan, Master Plan, amendment, Precise Development Plan, Use Permit, Vesting Tentative Map, and Tree Removal Permit.
2. Encourage the applicant to submit an alternative development proposal that is more in keeping with the existing Strawberry Community Plan
3. If the applicant desires to amend the Strawberry Community Plan the first step is to engage the community in a series of meetings.

The Board discussed the motion as follows:

1. Rebecca Lind stated that she would vote against the motion because she feels that the issue should stay in the local community before the Design Review Board for local input on revisions.
2. The Board discussed whether it would send a stronger signal to the developer to deny prior to commencing CEQA or to keep the issue before the Board to be able to review potential changes.
3. Board Chair Isis Spinola-Schwartz requested clarification from County staff about what the process would be should the Board vote to deny.
4. Jeremy Tjerian addressed the Board and the public and explained that the application would go to the Planning Commission for recommendation to the Board of Supervisors because the Community Plan Amendment triggers a legislative action with the Board of Supervisors as final decision maker. He stated that a recommendation of denial from the Design Review Board prior to CEQA was an option.
5. Rebecca asked whether the Strawberry community is represented on the county-wide Planning Commission and a member of the audience responded that there is representation.
6. The Board majority concluded that denial of the application is the best way to send a strong message to the developer.

Vote to deny the application per the motion:

Sherer	Yes
Brown	Yes
Omega	Yes
Lind	No

Spinola-Schwartz Yes.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45.

Minutes prepared by Rebecca Lind