

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
PLANNING DIVISION

Brian C. Crawford
DIRECTOR

Thomas Lai
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

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Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903



Marin County Civic Center
3501 Civic Center Drive
Suite 308
San Rafael, CA 94903
415 473 6269 T
415 473 7880 F
415 473 2255 TTY
www.marincounty.org/plan

SUBJECT: Santa Venetia Community Plan

Dear Board Members,

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends your Board consider the recommendation of the Marin County Planning Commission to adopt the 2017 Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan (Attachment 2).

SUMMARY:

The Santa Venetia Community Plan provides information and sets forth goals, policies, and guidance related to issues relevant to the unincorporated community of Santa Venetia, including natural resources, environmental hazards, land use, community character, parks and open space, and transportation. Preparation of the Santa Venetia Community Plan began in 2013 with the assistance of a nine member Advisory Committee. In the fall of 2014, the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors conducted public hearings to consider the 2014 Draft Plan and directed staff to continue working with the Advisory Committee to provide additional information and community-specific guidance, particularly for key properties of interest in the community. The plan was subsequently revised and supplemented in response to the direction provided, as described in more detail below. On October 13, 2016, the Marin County Planning Commission recommended approval of the 2016 Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan with several minor changes and edits which have been incorporated into the Planning Commission Approved Draft, which is provided for your review and consideration.

BACKGROUND:

In early 2013, Santa Venetia was selected as a priority candidate for a new community plan due to the absence of an existing community plan for this planning area as well as the high level of interest demonstrated by the residents of Santa Venetia, consistent with guidelines in the Community Plan Update Strategy adopted by your Board in 2012. Preparation of the Plan 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 former Supervisor Susan Adams met with staff on a monthly basis over the course of two and a half years 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 in 2013 and 2014 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.

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 more than 350 email subscribers.

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 by publishing notifications of public meetings and providing updates on the process in their bimonthly newsletter, on the SVNA website and through SVNA email lists.

A draft of the Plan was released in the summer of 2014, and was considered by the Planning Commission on October 27, 2014. While the Commission found the plan to be attractive, easy to read, and informative, Commissioners also felt that the plan should be expanded to include land use, density, and design policies for key sites in the community. There were also suggestions that the plan should provide policy direction on issues such as sea level rise, flood control, traffic capacity and affordable housing. The draft Plan was subsequently considered by your Board on November 25, 2014. Board members agreed that it would be appropriate to focus more attention on key properties in the community such as Buck's Launching and various commercial properties. Specifically, the Board indicated that the plan should provide more detailed information on existing zoning and Countywide Plan designations, special features and development considerations, and the ways in which specific Countywide Plan policies and zoning requirements would affect development on each site. However, the Board was not supportive of zoning changes that could raise legal issues or trigger the need for CEQA review. The Board was also in agreement that a countywide sea level rise vulnerability assessment should be completed before sea level rise is addressed in detail for any particular community.

Following public hearings in the fall of 2014, staff continued meeting with the Advisory Committee to incorporate additional information and guidance into the plan in response to the Planning Commission and Board's direction. Following several rounds of review by Advisory Committee members, a Revised Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan was released for public review on August 31, 2016. Key substantive modifications included the following:

- More detailed information and mapping were provided for six potential development/redevelopment sites within the community (Land Use and Community Character Chapter);
- Seven new policies related to natural resource issues such as native tree preservation and invasive plant control were added to the plan (Natural Resources Chapter);
- The Environmental Hazard Chapter was supplemented with more detailed information and updated mapping related to sea level rise;
- New policies were incorporated related to commercial businesses, signage, light pollution, open space areas, and North San Pedro Road (Land Use and Community Character and Transportation Chapters); and
- New recommendations were included related to community open space, recreational assets and the Buck's Launching property (Parks and Open Space Chapter).

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The Santa Venetia Community Plan is organized into seven chapters, summarized below. Substantive revisions made to the plan since it was last reviewed by your Board in 2014 are noted for each chapter.

Executive Summary

An Executive Summary providing a brief overview of the plan was added to the revised Draft, including a Summary of Policies, previously located at the end of the plan.

Chapter One - 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.

Chapter Two - Background

Chapter Two summarizes background material including Santa Venetia's location 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. Since the previous draft, this chapter was revised to include more detailed information regarding the Santa Venetia Neighborhood Association.

Chapter Three - 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 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. Since the previous draft, this chapter was amended to include policies related to natural resource issues of particular importance to the community, including marsh and wetland protection, invasive plant control, native tree preservation, and reducing the use of pesticides and insecticides.

Chapter Four - Environmental Hazards

The environmental hazards chapter focuses on two issues of particular concern to Santa Venetians, flooding and sea level rise. 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 (Flood Control Zone 7), working in conjunction with the Marin County Watershed Program, to minimize flooding in the community and undertake projects that integrate flood protection and environmental restoration within the Gallinas Creek watershed. The plan also includes a description of County Service Area #6 (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. 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. In response to Advisory Committee input, and with the assistance of Department of Public Works staff, this chapter was revised to incorporate long term flood protection goals for Flood Control Zone 7 acknowledging the need to work toward 100-year flood protection for the Santa Venetia community. A description of the permitting process for boat docks along Gallinas Creek was also provided. Finally, more detailed information and updated mapping was included related to sea level rise.

Chapter Five - Land Use and Community Character

Chapter Five addresses land uses in Santa Venetia and provides a brief discussion of development potential in 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. The 2014 Draft Plan included descriptions of three potential developments sites of particular interest to the community, Oxford Valley, the Marin Jewish Community Center, and the former MacPhail School site. In response to direction from the Planning Commission and Board, this section was expanded to include discussion of several additional properties and to provide much more detailed information for the key properties, including density considerations resulting from zoning and Countywide Plan designations, potential site development constraints, key Countywide Plan policies, and community preferences. Detailed mapping of potential constraints, such as wetland and stream conservation areas, was also included. Finally, the draft was revised to include a number of new policies related to commercial businesses, signage, light pollution, and the need to rezone publically-owned open space properties to reflect their use as public open space.

Chapter Six - Parks and Open Space

Chapter Six 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 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. Since the previous draft, additional community suggestions have been incorporated to preserve the community's existing recreational assets, support private efforts to purchase and protect open space lands, and provide a range of ideas for the Buck's Launching site. Following publication of the revised draft, the Parks Department informed staff that "Heron Hill" is not an independent open space preserve, but rather is considered to be part of the nearby San Pedro Mountain Preserve. Accordingly, the final draft of the plan has been revised to reflect this correction.

Chapter Seven - Transportation

Traffic congestion is an issue of particular concern in Santa Venetia. Chapter Seven 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 are accurately assessed. To maintain existing community character, a policy has also been added to clarify the community's preference for maintaining North San Pedro Road as a two-lane roadway.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

As noted previously, the Planning Commission considered the 2016 Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan on October 13, 2016, and recommended approval of the plan to your Board with several modifications changes and edits which have been incorporated into the Planning Commission Approved Draft Plan provided as Attachment 2 to this report. In addition to minor revisions and edits to correct typographic errors and update information, the Planning Commission recommended the following substantive modifications:

1. Modify existing Policy LU-8 to address underwater properties as follows:

LU-8: Rezone Open Space Properties Rezone the following publically-owned properties to Open Area (OA) and, where applicable, amend he Countywide Plan land use designation to Open Space (OS) to reflect their use as public open space:

- Santa Venetia Marsh: APN 180-090-03
- Santa Margarita Island: APN 180-021-20 & 21

- "Heron Hill": APN 180-231-05, 06, 07 & 09 and 180-291-04

This policy should be considered in the context of a broader initiative by CDA to rezone publicly-owned open space properties to OA on a countywide basis. The rezoning of underwater properties should also be considered as part of this effort to prevent inappropriate development of tidal areas adjoining Santa Venetia and throughout the County.

2. Revise the Introduction to incorporate the Countywide Plan guiding principles by inserting the following text.

The Countywide Plan focuses on the "Three E's" of sustainability: the environment, the economy, and social equity. Maximizing the balance of a healthy environment, economic viability, and social equity is important for establishing a sustainable future for the County and for individual communities. The Guiding Principles of the Countywide Plan offer the following overarching sustainability goals:

Environmental Quality

- Link equity, economy, and the environment locally, regionally, and globally.
- Minimize the use of finite resources, and use all resources efficiently and effectively.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.
- Protect and restore open space, wilderness, and damaged ecosystems, and enhance habitats for biodiversity.
- Protect agricultural lands and work to maintain the County's agricultural heritage, while supporting the production of healthy, fresh, locally grown food; and
- Reduce the use and minimize the release of hazardous materials.

Social Equity

- Protect and expand fair and affordable housing opportunities to meet a diversity of housing needs.
- Cultivate ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity within communities; and
- Support public health, safety, and social justice, and provide equal access to amenities and services.

Economy

- Provide affordable, efficient, and effective transportation to better connect jobs, housing, schools, shopping and recreation facilities and which reduces dependence on single occupancy vehicles, conserves resources, improves air quality, and reduces traffic congestion;
- Support locally owned businesses and retain, expand, and attract a diversity of businesses that meet the needs of the residents and strengthen the economic base; and
- Educate and prepare our workforce and all sectors of the community to retain meaningful employment and achieve economic independence.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No written comments regarding the Santa Venetia Community Plan have been submitted to date. On February 3rd, staff received a call from a Vendola Drive resident who expressed support for continued power boat access to Buck's Launching. Should this property be acquired by the County, a future planning effort for facilities and operation of the site would be conducted by the Parks Department. However, the Community Plan incorporates a range of community suggestions that should be considered as part of such efforts, including the maintenance of facilities for small boats (both motorized and non-motorized), while acknowledging that public access and the desire for recreational facilities will need to be balanced with protection of the site's sensitive natural resources.

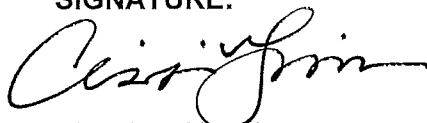
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Adoption of the Santa Venetia Community Plan is within the scope of the Marin Countywide Plan Final Environmental Impact Report. Pursuant to Public Resources Code 21166 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 and 15168, no additional environmental review is required.

RECOMMENDATION

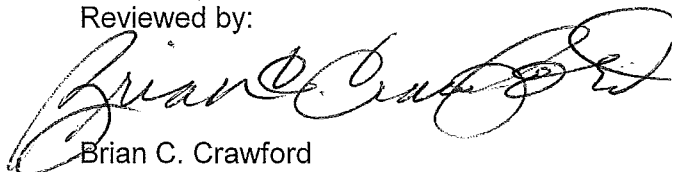
On behalf of the Planning Commission, staff recommends your Board review the administrative record, conduct a public hearing, and consider adopting the Santa Venetia Community Plan based on the findings contained in the attached resolution (Attachment 1).

SIGNATURE:



Christine Gimmler
Senior Planner

Reviewed by:



Brian C. Crawford
Director

Attachments:

- 1. Recommended Resolution

In order to save resources, paper copies of the following documents are only provided to the Board of Supervisors. 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.

- 2. Planning Commission Approved Draft Santa Venetia Community Plan

